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# THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY



# THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY

BY

JOSEPH NEWTON

LONDON

HODDER AND STOUGHTON

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TO THE REV.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

THESE SERMONS ARE DEDICATED

WITH PROFOUND ESTEEM





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# THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY



# I

## THE PROBLEM OF PERSONALITY

“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”—PSALM cxxxix. 14.

THE “I” of the text represents the culminating product of the creative process. According to the strictest science it stands for the crown and completion of all that is. “I” represents a deeper profundity than all the abysses of star-strewn space. The vast expanse revealed by the telescope is eclipsed by the inward infinitude that confronts the true introspective seer. He Who “knew what was in man” has spoken of him as the masterpiece of the Divine artist, a miniature of the Supreme. Man has vital and sublime affinities with the Uncreated. God regards him as a congener or kindred spirit. I can develop into perfect oneness with the Infinite, but I cannot degenerate into real identity with the



brute. Personality and mere individuality are separated by an impassable chasm. The disparity between crass ignorance and kingly intellectualism is insignificant when compared with the dissimilitude that exists between an animal and a person. The scavenger may grow into a scientist, but he can never "degenerate into an ape." Ruskin recognises "a great gulf of specific separation" between man and the brute creation. He also sees in man "a promise of a communion ultimately deep, close, and conscious with God." Matthew Arnold tells us that the God many of us worship is only a magnified Lord Shaftesbury. Are we justified in investing Deity with the characteristic attributes of humanity? Our answer is, "Yes." The loftiest conception of the Supreme is that of a perfect, infinite Personality. There are four things we wish to emphasise,—the possession, the purpose, the persistence, and the perfection of the mysterious "ego."

I. The possession of personality. True egoism is the direct creation of Christianity. The Perfect Man is the supreme emphasiser

of the "I." Let us examine a few of the constituent elements of this "I" as they appear in the electric light of His teaching. The primary characteristics of personality are thought, will, and love. The mind is the retina of the soul which receives spiritual impressions, and which makes a vision of the Divine possible. The profound affinities that exist between human and Divine intelligence make revelation real. The coster can achieve the mental miracles of thinking God's thoughts after Him. God cannot violate His rational intuitions without self-sacrilege. "My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . saith the Lord." The difference is one of depth, purity, sweep, and not of ultimate essence. The time is coming when I shall apprehend and rethink the Divine thoughts, and when every string of my reason will be brought into harmony with the perfect Intelligence. The will of a man stands for a force compared with which gravitation is as nothing. Astronomers tell us that the seasons are caused by changes in the earth's axis; and, that these changes are determined more by

internal that external forces. The "will" can determine the soul's inclination toward the Sun of Righteousness, and is responsible for the climatic changes to which life is subject. It can cowardly capitulate with the evil one, or stiffen its back and resist the allied forces of the pit. Who can gauge the "impact on the world" of the "I will" of a Cæsar, or a Luther? The words of Tennyson express the grand climax of volition, "Our wills are ours to make them Thine." Love stands for the sublimest endowment of the soul. Love is the inmost essence of Deity. Love will transform the human soul into an exactness of resemblance with God which means identity. He who loves the Divine becomes divine to the profundities of his being. This "I" is fearfully and wonderfully made, for it can know God, will the right, love the Divine.

II. The purpose of personality. Why was man created? The Westminster Catechism says, "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy Him for ever." Science glorifies God by adding elements of grandeur to our conceptions of

His infinitude, intelligence, and power. Government glorifies God by its recognition and protection of the diviner elements in man. Art glorifies God by emphasising and refining man's purest ideals. But the luminous halo that encircles the soul of the good is an incomparably grander glorification of God than the solar splendour of the skies. God is far more effectively glorified by holiness in the heart than by purity in paint. We glorify God by reflecting the Divine beauty, by voluntarily electing the right, by persistently pursuing the loftiest end. The soul "in tune with the Infinite" is capable of more thrilling harmony than the music of the spheres. The pianissimos of the saintly spirit in the sick-room, move the emotions of the Deity as the thundering fortissimos of material creation cannot. May God make us more perfect reflectors of His glory, more irresistible proclaimers of His infinite love!

And it is the priceless privilege of man to "fully enjoy Him for ever." What are the delights of the æsthete, or the pleasure of the mere intellectualist, compared with the enjoyment of the Divine? The believing

peasant is capable of higher joys than the æsthetic celebrities of culture. The panorama of the skies is but a "penny show," when contrasted with the ravishing unfoldings of the Divine glory and goodness vouchsafed to the child of God. "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," for I represent the focus of the Divine self-revelations, the very climax of the gracious unveilings of the Supreme. "I am fearfully and wonderfully made," for the purpose of my being is to be a reflector of His glory and His confidant for ever.

III. The persistence of personality. We believe with the poet that—

"What is excellent  
As God lives is permanent ;"

and with Dr. Martineau—"Nothing human ever dies." The grand tendency of true science is to intensify rather than efface self-consciousness. Plunge me into the depths of stellar space and I can say with Tennyson, "I am I." The inrushing ocean obliterates the pools on the beach, but the advancing waves of light and learning will not submerge this "I." The



banker's safety-vault may yield to the devices of the purloiner, but the inward cell in which this "I" entrenches itself is impregnable to the sacrilegious attacks of science. Sin may mar and brutalise my being, but it cannot destroy my identity. This "I" can distort and paralyse itself, but it cannot commit suicide; the apothecaries of hell can never concoct a poison absolutely fatal to it. The saint "loses" himself in God only the more intensely to realise himself. Absorption in God does not mean the extinction, but the extension of this "I." Personal identity cannot be injured by death. Goethe says, "The destruction of such a mind as Wieland's is not to be thought of." "My tomb," says Victor Hugo, "is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes in the twilight to open in the dawn." Plotinus said, when dying, "I am struggling to liberate the divinity within me." No, death cannot dissolve the permanent elements of conscious being. The scientist may emphasise my affinities with the insect, reptile, or quadruped, but he cannot put me in the same category. Sin may impair the "I,"

but it cannot unrivet the bonds of its existence. Satan may rob me of my peace, but not of my personality. However closely allied to God I may become, I shall ever maintain my relative independence. In life, in death, in heaven or in hell, I shall be "I" for ever and ever.

IV. The perfection of personality. This perfection means not an exaltation out of myself, but a realisation of the possibilities of my being. I may acquire a harmonious and symmetrical manhood. The seemingly independent and contrary attributes of my nature may be brought into co-operation and oneness. There may be dormant, unexercised faculties in my mind, which may by-and-by eclipse corresponding ones in the Seraph. The complex powers of the soul are not in perfect poise. A great gulf may exist between perception and inclination. Imperious will may trample on cringing reason. The great end of existence is a full-orbed, proportionally developed personality. The perfection and balance of the soul's capacities are attainable. Time is too short to realise all the transcendent possibilities of our

nature. In eternity I shall play not one, but the million rôles in the soul's repertoire. Michael Angelo, who achieved incomparable distinction in several arts, is a type and prophecy of my transcendent achievements in heaven. I shall be a musician, for my soul will be in vibrant sympathy with that personal Harmony to whom eternity will be attuned. The amateurs of heaven eclipse the Paderewskis of earth. They strike a more entrancing note than any we have heard in this world. And the exercise of every spiritual power will mean a constant acquisition of personality. The "I" will expand into an entity of inconceivable dimensions. The circumference of this "I"—which, according to some, is so close to the centre—is capable of infinite expansion. I am bigger than the Andes now; in heaven I may transcend in magnitude the archangel. May Christ inoculate us with His own reverence for man! This is a special need of the times.

"He who feels contempt  
For any living thing, hath faculties  
That he hath never used; and thought with him  
Is in its infancy."

In what was once a Christian temple in Constantinople is a portraiture of Christ, which, by the command of a Mohammedan potentate, is covered with canvas. In the lowest type of humanity there are obscured lineaments of the Divine. Somewhere in the hidden cavities of the most unpoetic mind lies buried an ore of Tennysonian gold. The darkest cells of the brain are not absolutely devoid of rays from the Primal Intelligence. "God created man in His own image" is a Scripture which justifies and inspires the highest philanthropy, and which virtually condemns the cynicism and disdain of misanthropy. The finite bears the impress of the Infinite; therefore, the legislation that abases him is treason against God. Contempt for the sacred rights of the poor is positive blasphemy.

It is a sacrilege to make man the butt of irreverent scorn: satirical epithets hurled at man strike the Divine Archetype. Even the "impish dwarfs" of Stanley and the almost equally brutish denizens of the City slum, are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. They are capable of something

diviner than all the recorded achievements of human learning and skill. There is a capacity in them for loving God. When compared with love, everything pales into insignificance. As Browning says:

“Even the creation fades  
Into a puny exercise of power.”

A deeper reverence for man would transform our institutions, purify our governments, and constrain the Churches to grander self-sacrifice on his behalf.



“THE UNWISE GREAT”





## II

### “THE UNWISE GREAT”

“It is not the great that are wise.”—JOB xxxii. 9.

TO point out the deficiencies and deformities of the great men of learning, society, and the Church, we feel to be anything but a pleasant and congenial task. Yet it is our clear duty to judge creeds and principles in the light of the characters and practices of their expounders and advocates. If atheism can produce a sublimer result than a Paul, is it wise to be a Christian? On the other hand, if godless culture warps personality and quenches the true shekinah in man, is it honest to extol it, or wise to pursue it? The Christianisation of our conception of true greatness represents a supreme need of our time. Spiritual wisdom is an essential factor of real greatness. Our text finds pathetic verifications in every sphere of thought and

action. In studying characters of many men of eminence, we are confronted with such saddening antitheses as a rich imagination and a pliant conscience, gigantic minds and shrivelled hearts, sublime theories and polluted lives. God save us from the fatal folly of identifying fame with virtue, princely powers with personal piety!

I. The great men of Literature and Art are not always wise. Martineau says, “The wildest theories, most ruinous projects, and most pernicious principles have owed their origin to highly intellectual men.” Says Carlyle, “Look at the biography of authors! Except the Newgate Calendar it is the most sickening chapter in the history of man.” Were the utterances and spirit of the sage of Chelsea always inspired by spiritual wisdom? Carlyle occupies a very high position among our “Literary Immortals”; but this fierce denouncer of sham was often pathetically deficient in the charity “which suffereth long and is kind.” The rays of this sun exposed the meanest, but rarely vivified the highest in man. The more I study him, the more he dazzles and the less

he allures. Hatred of the falsities of faith and convention was more characteristic of him than passion for the truth, “as it is in Jesus.” Is it wise to subordinate personal holiness to critical intellectualism, or sanctity to genius? Goethe achieved unparalleled distinction in the literature of culture; yet the exquisite poet and the profound philosopher displayed “the whiteness of the leper instead of the whiteness of the snow.” When Wordsworth read Goethe’s “Wilhelm Meister” his whole soul revolted against its indecencies, and he flung the book from his hand. Does a princely mind atone for pagan morals? or a halo of renown for spiritual putridity? Is it wise to assiduously cultivate the lower side of our nature, and habitually strangle our loftier instincts? Turner possessed an incomparable pictorial imagination. The study of his character profoundly affected me. Intellectually he seemed more closely related to the brutish than to the human. Did artistic supremacy indemnify him for an ignorant mind, a starved heart, a stained soul? Can we conceive of a more pathetic spectacle than that of this solitary genius,

"clothed with a cloud and with a rainbow upon his head, and with the sun and stars given into his hand," setting off on Saturday night "to some low sailor's house in Wapping or Rotherhithe to wallow till Monday morning summoned him to mope through another week" ? The "superlative moralisings" of mere literary savants are sadly disappointing in their reflex results.

"And by some mighty magic yet unknown,  
Our actions guide, yet cannot guide their own."

If kingly intellectualism is denied us, holiness of heart is possible to every one of my readers. Great celebrities of culture are eclipsed in grace by the saintly unrenowned of Christ. We are not surrounded by Schopenhauers, Comtes, Eliots, and Shelleys, yet we live in close contact with many who are far more perfect reflectors of Divinity. False wisdom would rationalise and sublime Christian morality, true wisdom seeks to embody and practise it. If we cannot be destructive tornadoes like Carlyle, we can be the world's salt and light in a truly religious sense. Better be an incarnated gospel, a "living epistle read and known by all men,"

than a brilliant literary agnostic with a soul soiled by sensuality. We agree with a modern writer that “there is no supreme character without a supernatural creed.” Look not to the illustrious apostles of atheism for a practical exhibition of the loftier virtues and graces. Their distorted lives and profoundly defective characters are effective repudiations of their vaunted philosophies. My young friends, let goodness be the dominant element in the greatness to which you aspire. Aim not at an expansion of mind which means a concurrent contraction of heart. Pray for the Christianisation of your ambitions and ideals. It is infinitely wiser to seek to possess and exemplify the spirit of the Master, than to concentrate thought and energy on the acquisition of worldly wisdom. It is possible for the commonplace Christian to be “the light of the world” in a truer sense than many of the dazzling suns of genius have ever proved themselves to be.

II. The great men of Society are not always wise. We do not believe that environment necessarily determines the hue of

the soul, yet we are compelled to admit that the atmosphere we breathe profoundly affects character. Those who live on the summits of Society are exposed to specific perils. The air that is stimulating to social ambition may prove relaxing to religious life. Are the inhabitants of these aristocratic altitudes proving themselves invulnerable to the specious evils that constantly beset them? Thousands of these make rank or social distinction the supreme goal of life. Their deplorable extravagances, ostentatious displays, and other feverish attempts to escape from equality, are pathetic to witness. How ingrained their selfishness! how paltry their contribution to the amelioration of the sufferings and the elevation of the morals of the world! The spirit, methods, and utterances of the great statesmen of the world often prove their lack of the wisdom that cometh from above. We will not dwell on such pitiable phenomena as amateurs directing and embarrassing national finance, forming and muddling alliances and enterprises. What saddens us most is the constant sacrifice of principle to party, of conscience



to capital, of morals to materialism, by the leading lights of the political world. Our professional celebrities are not always wise. A distinguished French advocate says, “I cannot acclimatise myself in the atmosphere of chicanery.” Alas! many are accomplishing this feat with comparative ease. Some, who have achieved notoriety in medicine, have succumbed to the subtle and peculiar temptations of their calling. These social, political, and professional lights supply some of the saddest illustrations of the truth of our text. The vast majority of us can never climb to social eminence. Should the realisation of this fact cost us a single sigh? If recognition by royalty is denied us, spiritual intimacy with the Supreme is possible to the humblest. The coster may become the confidant of the Eternal. “I have set before thee an open door.” Pious poverty has real consolations and compensation. “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.” Thousands of Christians habitually ignore the last of the ten commandments—“Thou shalt not covet.” Is it wise to envy the rich who have “paid

in spirituals for what they have gained in temporals"? The Master is still saying to multitudes of his followers, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness." The Christianisation of our views of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" represents an urgent need of our times. We agree with Robertson of Brighton that covetousness is often the inspirer of modern levelling agitations. God help rich and poor to realise that the obligations of brotherhood are mutual! Let us not exhaust our energies in denouncing the vices of the great and fail to passionately plead with God on their behalf. The politically great, who twist, and cringe, and deceive, should have our constant prayers as well as our conscientious disapproval. "Brethren, let every man wherein he is called, therein abide with God." Better be a saint in a garret than a godless monarch on a throne, or a mere party sun in a senate. The grandest prizes of life—peace, blessedness, salvation—are within the reach of the humblest. Let us devote our energies to the acquisition of the highest—knowledge of and likeness to the Divine.



III. The great men of the Church are not always wise. Imprudence in critical ecclesiastical emergencies has again and again marked their spirit and action. Giants in sectarianism have turned out pigmies in sanctity. Phylactered dignitaries have steeped their robes in the blood of saints. Reputed connoisseurs in spiritual art have mistaken a Christian Raphael for a satanic forgery. Spiritually accredited and unquestionably authentic masterpieces of the Supreme Artist have been banned as spurious. The priceless pearl of faith has often been mistaken for the painted pebble of fiction. Some of the most vaunted treasures of the Church's Museum are turning out to be frauds. Is it wise to allow the fissures of prejudice to broaden into impassable chasms? Was Calvin wise when he advised Somerset to “punish well by the sword Catholics and fanatic gospellers”? Was Bishop Butler wise in denouncing John Wesley as an enemy of the Church? Is a certain High Church potentate wise in stigmatising Non-conformists as “satanic schismatics”? Is it wise to allow religion to exclude rather than

pervade, transcend, and sanctify legitimate temporalities? Are the utterances of certain illustrious exponents of Christianity in reference to Modern Criticism characterised by the loftiest wisdom? The "great men" of the pew are not always wise. Was Lord Melbourne wise when he left the Church in a rage, saying, "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life"? The influence and advance of the Church may be neutralised and impeded by narrowness, bigotry, uncharitableness, at the head or in the ranks. Let all the Christian Churches, which would accomplish the purpose of heaven, give special and constant heed to the Scriptural injunction—"seek after wisdom." Never was it more necessary for Christians to pray for the wisdom that cometh from above than it is to-day. The Church has entered an intensely critical period. The final outcome of her conflicts with science, her concessions to secularism, her decisions with regard to doctrine and method, will be largely determined by those at the helm. Let us pray that Zion may be steered, not by an

ecclesiastical compass, but by the “Bright and Morning Star”! God grant that our spiritual helmsmen may be Christianly-wise, men of sanctified sagacity, rather than of monarchical mien, or apostolic pedigree! Let the Church resent and render impossible the preferment of men conspicuously lacking in spiritual wisdom. The unwise great would do infinitely less damage as stokers than as steersmen. May those who direct the cause of the Church loyally and unerringly obey the command of the Divine Captain, whether it is “Port the helm” or “Starboard the helm”! Let the expounders of religion themselves be burning and shining lights, and proclaimers of personally experienced Christian truths. In a church in Venice the whole New Testament has been translated into stone. May our “leading lights” be Christlike saints rather than clever sculptors! In the presence of a Wesley “mountains and hills are made low.” Let us all “covet earnestly the best gift”—wisdom. If prominence and power are denied us, prudence and piety are within our reach. Our first aim should be a sanctified

character, and not a sublimated creed. “The kingdom of heaven is within you.” Comparatively few can attain to mental, social, ecclesiastical greatness, but the humblest peasant and the most ignorant scavenger can become “wise unto salvation.”

HELMED BY THE HIGHEST



### III

## HELMED BY THE HIGHEST

“Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters.”—EZEK.  
xxvii. 26.

THESE words are addressed by Ezekiel to Tyre, a city of ancient Phœnicia, which Isaiah calls the “Mart of Nations.” At this time Jerusalem was in a state of desolation. Tyre had exulted in the misery and misfortune of the “Holy City,” saying, “Aha, she is broken . . . she is laid waste.” But Ezekiel knew that Tyre was built on the slopes of an Etna, and that this strong emporium of commerce should be brought low. There are individuals, nations, and churches that have yet to learn that material success is no guarantee of strength and perpetuity. The supreme need of England to-day is Christian helmsmen. Many of us bow to the autocracy of what is not Divine. The authority of Christ is far from being

absolute in the realms of thought, politics, industry, and religion. We are, in many senses, in "great waters" because our elected rowers have been irreligious principles, prejudices, and passions.

I. Who are our rowers as Individuals? Take first the matter of Creed. Many who were once moored to Eternal Truth have obeyed the imperious command of a Hæckel to "launch out into the deep," and are to-day drifting towards the Niagara of unbelief. Many have allowed the critics, who are constantly emphasising the defectiveness of the astronomy, geology, and botany of Genesis, to undermine their confidence in the reality of Divine revelation. The atmosphere of atheistic science has closed the pores of their souls, making the infiltration of Divine ideas into their minds well-nigh impossible. Thousands of our young men, trained in our Sunday-schools, are succumbing to the influence of rationalism, which is deadening the instinct of prayer, devitalising their faith, and sapping their spiritual virility. Some of these plume themselves on their deliverance from spiritual faddishness



and superstition. God help the Church to convince these that their minds are steered by scientific meteors, not suns, that the invisibles of faith are fast becoming the realities of science, that atheism is provably and disastrously irrational!

Again, the character of many is a pathetic proof that the reins of their being are in the hands of evil prejudices and forces. The Divine is repressed, and the devilish is allowed to mount to the throne of brain and heart. Spiritual convictions are stifled, and a false practicalism is permitted to whittle away the meaning of conversion and holiness. The conscience is governed by a blundering, shortsighted prudence, and the backbone of the soul degenerates into cartilage. The outwardly decorous young man tampers with, and concedes to, the mud-bred serpent of carnal corruption. Many, who now parley with the inward adder of passion will eventually surrender to it their sanctum sanctorum. God help us to dethrone these critical, atheistic, and worldly usurpers of the Divine! On the tempestuous sea of modern thought and activity the only unerring

Pilot is Christ. And does not the practical conduct of many of us prove that our spirit, methods, and aspirations are helmed by the popular deities of convention, compromise, and materialism? To the ordinary Christian the demands of custom are often more irresistibly imperious than the commands of the Cross. The rules of etiquette are stringently observed, even when they clash with the laws of love. Our crowded "At Homes" and our empty society classrooms are pathetic illustrations of the supersession of the Highest by the high. Many Christians, for prudence' sake, enter into ignominious confederacy with the sworn enemies of justice, humanity, and purity. These nominal soldiers of Christ are never found at the point of extreme exposure. They shelter in conventional entrenchments at the farthest remove from the fighting-line. Jesus said, "Follow Me." May our creed, character, and conduct bear testimony to a whole-hearted obedience to this command! The soul that is always in vital communion with Christ is never alarmed by atheistic prophecies; the devilish in him

is ever on the wane, and the Divine evolving and flourishing. God help us to absolutely surrender the throne of our being to the One who alone can worthily occupy it.

II. Who are our rowers as a Nation? The Christianisation of the spirit, motive, and method of our State administrators is more imperative than ever. Our national steersmen have brought us to a critical juncture. How portentous in significance are the words of Lord Esher, "Imperial rule can have no ultimate basis but adequate and organised physical force"! The spirit and ambitions of many of our military, legal, and industrial commandants are completely leavened by this egregious fallacy. Some of our popular parliamentary oarsmen practically assent to the theory that Mammon is the maker of nations. The influence of Bacchus on our public administrators is notorious. This pathetic fact we would particularly emphasise here. Our ablest imperial authorities agree that intemperance stands for one of our gravest national perils. Many of our acutest and broadest

statesmen agree with "ignorant and narrow abstainers" that the stains of England are "crimson enough to incarnadine the multitudinous seas over which she rules." Mr. Chamberlain says, "Drink is the curse of the country." Our most eminent judges, clergy, physicians, and economists are one in this indictment. England is pressing to its heart this deadly serpent which is eating away its very vitals. More than £230,000,000 sterling is invested in the liquor traffic of this country; among the shareholders are peers, bishops, deans, archdeacons, canons and scores of reverends. This infernal trade has brought us as a nation into great waters. Where is our hope? Our king, some years ago, asked the question, "If evils are preventible, why are they not prevented?" That national drunkenness can be largely suppressed is unquestionable. Millions have yet to be convinced that Bacchus puts a brake on the revolving wheels of physical, economic, and moral progress. We must, as never before, emphasise the appalling deteriorating effects of alcoholism on the physical

system. The vulnerability of the drunkard to lunacy, paralysis, and other bodily infirmities is incontestible. It is equally undeniable that the excessive consumption of alcohol is disastrous from a strictly economic point of view. Intemperance is largely the cause of the commercial condition we call "over-production." That the temperance campaign is really opposed to the interests of the Imperial Exchequer is a hell-bred sophism. But the creation of a national consciousness of the moral criminality of this traffic must be the transcendent passion of all Christian reformers. Wesley says, "It is inexcusable ill-husbandry to give the lives of valuable and useful men for any sum of money whatever." J. S. Mill says, "My liberty ends when it begins to involve the possibility of ruin to my neighbour." An intenser realisation of the heinousness and cruelty of this national vice stands for one of the supremest needs of millions of Christians. We believe with Canon Barnett, that "It is the business of the Church to act as pioneer." Christ created the passion that abolished slavery; an intelligent and



fervid Evangelicalism alone can demolish this demon. God forbid that the religious communities of this realm should continue to procrastinate, postpone, and cowardly acquiesce in this gigantic sin! Let Christians unite in fearlessly denouncing this evil; in bringing about constructive temperance reform; in making the glaring legal iniquities of our land intolerable to the conscience of our people.

III. Who are our rowers as Churches? Do the preaching, practice, and ruling passion of Christian communities prove that Christ is always at the helm? Is not the theology of some pulpits often more intensely denominational than evangelical? There are pulpits so inconceivably sacred that the presence of a John Wesley in them would be regarded as awful sacrilege. We must admit that the pulpit sometimes degenerates into a sectarian "receiver," vibrating with communications from theological headquarters and not from Calvary. Its passion is often stirred by some potential creedist when it should be ablaze with fiery zeal for Christ. Its doctrine almost invariably bears the

ecclesiastical brand, but is not always steeped in the blood of the Saviour. Why is the spiritual temperature of some churches so low? One reason is because their pulpits are governed by cold and pulseless tradition and formality. One cold Sunday morning, a casual visitor to a country church asked the verger, "Have you no heating apparatus here?" Pointing to the pulpit, the verger replied, "Yes, there it is." A pulpit red-hot with a passion for Christ and for souls will heat the pew, quicken its pulse, and intensify its vitality as nothing else can. God grant that the motive, method, and message of the pulpit may always bear witness to its faithfulness to the Highest! What of the practical activities of the Churches? Is the net result of Christian labour in any sense satisfactory? How many churches serve God and mankind to the full extent of their powers? Are not the policies and activities of many Christians determined and directed by the popular deity of compromise? The silence and lethargy of the Churches in face of the vices that welter on every side is the result of an "inglorious truce" with this

false god. Thousands of Christians practically deny the doctrine, and deplore the spirit, of one of our modern Luthers, who said recently, "Christ demands extreme men." Many have not yet learned the lesson that we "cannot get butter out of milk without agitation." When Christ is our supreme inspiration and absolute Master, we shall become wise and fearless Christian "extremists," courageous enough to denounce what is anti-Christian in gorgeous palaces as well as in foetid slums. What is the dominant passion of the Churches? God grant that it may always be the salvation of mankind and the glory of the Lord! When Christ is really the "Head of the Church," conversions will not be so rare as they are now. When an intense evangelical zeal burns and blazes in pulpit and pew, the penitent form will not be what it is to-day. According to Hazlitt, the dissenting parsons of his day "only bowed the knee to the Highest." Oh that this were true of all ministers and congregations of our own day! When Christ is truly our Rower, we shall be brought not "into great waters," but into the haven of perfect peace.



“My bark is wafted to the strand  
By breath Divine ;  
And on the helm there rests a hand  
Other than mine.

One who has known in storms to sail  
I have on board ;  
Above the raging of the gale  
I hear my Lord.

Safe to the land—safe to the land,  
The end is this ;  
And then with Him go hand in hand  
Far into bliss.”



## THE FACULTY OF FAITH



## IV

### THE FACULTY OF FAITH

“By faith.”—HEB. xi. 3.

RUSKIN was driven to the conclusion that “these are much sadder ages than the earlier ones.” Mental and moral evolution has sensitised our nerves, and intensified our sorrows as well as our joys. The agonies of the primitive cave-dwellers were far less racking and acute than are those of many modern astronomers. There is a sense in which natural development increases pain and multiplies mystery. Life is often darker in the academy than in the hovel, on the altitudes of learning than in the depths of pauperism. Where must we moderns look for solace and strength when confronted by the depressing enigmas of life? Ruskin says, “The profoundest reason for this darkness of heart is, I believe, our want of

faith." One has truly said, "Nothing but the Infinite pity is sufficient for the infinite pathos of life." The most fervent and impassioned petition in the prayers of the Churches should be, "Lord, increase our faith." The unchangeable condition of spiritual perception, prosperity, and peace is the Christianised faith of the Apostles. With such a faith we can remove mountains. There are three things on which I want to dwell—viz. the convictions, the conquests, and the consummations of this faith.

I. The convictions of faith. These convictions include, or develop into, profound assurance of the Divine, practical assent to the Divine, and personal assimilation of the Divine. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen." How pathetic and fruitless are the attempts of unbelief to indentify this assurance with fancy or fanaticism! True faith is as free from credulity as true science. Intuitively discerned facts coerce belief in a personal Evolver, as the proven certainties of nature compel belief in physical evolution. Is there a power at the back of things? Mature

science answers with a definite, decisive "Yes." Is there a loving Father? Faith answers with an equally reasonable and confident affirmative. The "Yes" of religion completes the "Yes" of reason, but it does not contradict it. The faith that transforms power into personality is supplementary, but it is not necessarily antagonistic to the teachings of science. Science is truth demonstrable to the mind, and, as Pascal puts it, "Faith is God perceptible to the heart." The "eternities" and "immensities," which Carlyle practically deified in mid-life, were the conclusions of his reason. The Everlasting Father, whom the Christian worships, represents a spiritual reality apprehended by the soul's supreme faculty of discernment—faith. Now the faith that eclipses reason does not necessarily contradict it; indeed, the former stimulates, satisfies, and sanctifies the latter. Spiritual assurance is the grand result of the divinest in mind and heart acting in unison. It is only when allied to faith that the intellect finds true rest. Religious assurance includes, though it stands for more than, rational apprehension.

God help the Churches to explode the heresy that religion is essentially unreasonable! These profound and rational convictions of faith lead to an intelligent and whole-hearted assent to the Divine. Faith does not judge according to appearance. "To see aright is art, poetry, religion, all in one." Faith has glimpsed the Divine, and is assured that all that emanates from the Divine can be harmonised with infinite righteousness, wisdom, and love. It knows that the seemingly irrational in the methods of God is, in reality, infinitely wise. There is an assent which is nothing but stoical, heartless acquiescence; the "Thy will be done" of faith is the language of enlightened conviction, the result of personal insight. There is a glimpse of God vouchsafed to faith which makes Divine blunders and cruelties absolutely impossible. When faith and reason "kiss each other"—which they can do without unworthy compromises on either side,—their united testimony is "What is, is best."

Again, faith assimilates the Divine. We are told that "the most wholesome diet



is the most assimilable." The spiritual nutriment faith absorbs becomes part of the personality. The believing soul incorporates the Divine, and becomes more and more intensely Divine. Faith does more than aggrandise; it transforms the great truths of religion into integral elements of its being. Are we exercising faith's powers of appropriation? "God is love." Are our minds, consciences, and hearts being gradually, suffused with this love? "The Lord reigneth." Has the personal recognition of this fact transformed our fear into fortitude? "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Does the realisation of the Divine presence lift us sublimely above the doubts and despairs of the godless pessimists by whom we are surrounded?

II. The conquests of faith. In this chapter we have a "sweeping summary" of Old Testament heroes whose names no moth or lichen of time can eat away. Thank God these victors of heaven have their triumphant representatives in the world to-day! We have men in our midst who wear the mantle and blaze with the zeal

of Benedict, Gregory, Francis of Assisi, Luther, Wesley. The reinforcement of their ranks represents one of the Church's supremest needs. Self, Science, Society, stand for realms teeming with scornful, defiant foes which true faith can quell. Self-mastery is the condition of all spiritual conquests. St. Columban says, "Whosoever overcomes himself treads the world underfoot." Alexander the Great utterly succumbed to the indwelling demons of drunkenness and debauchery. To trample out of existence the hellish serpent of carnal corruption is a sublimer achievement than to found a huge empire. The daily heroisms of the man of faith, who refuses to pamper the beast and suppress the man, eclipse in glory many military exploits extolled in song and enshrined in history. True faith will enter into no ignominious alliances with goodness-aping demons clothed in garbs "doubly-lined with the fox-fur of hypocrisy." The man of faith practically acknowledges the supremacy of the Divine, and ever aims at "truth in the inward parts." When Paul's eyes were opened, he flung away his

Pharisaic shams and became the apostle and embodiment of absolute truth. Let us pray for the faith that will enable us not only to triumph over the bestial in our nature, but also to rise superior to the paltry prejudices and sectarian passions which impede our growth and impair our spiritual influence! "By faith" the Christian is rendered impregnable to the assaults of scientific unbelief. Conscious of anchorage in the Eternal, the most startling bulletins from the headquarters of unbelief fail to unnerve him; he knows that no explosive has ever been invented that can shatter the central citadel of his soul. The all-eclipsing miracle of the ages is the existence of Christianity in the world to-day. Evolutionists have failed to wrench the Supreme Evolver from the grip of faith, or to prove their contention that the Divine is superfluous and unverifiable. It is not hysteria, but constant possession of Eternal Truth, that makes the Christian laugh at the sinister schemes of cultured unbelief for the destruction of his confidence. "Let the inhabitants of the rock sing." The sun of

knowledge is rising, but true religion is not disappearing. Again, true faith triumphs over the imperious iniquities and conventional rottenness rampant in the society of to-day. The martyrs of the stake, who

“Would lift their raptured looks on high  
As though it were a joy to die,”

have their living representatives in the Church to-day. Nonconformity can boast of death-defying heroes who would not fear

“To flesh the tiger’s ravenous jaws, or feel  
The sportive fury of the fencer’s steel.”

May God increase their number! The world needs, perhaps as never before, the thunder and lightning of Elijahs to awaken it out of its moral stupor. Let us pray for a more aggressive, uncompromising faith, a faith that will courageously attack the fortress of evil, defy the rude omnipotence of Mammonism, denounce governmental outrages, and realise the drastic reforms demanded by conscience. Such a faith does not stand for an unrealisable phantom; it may be possessed and exercised by us.

III. The consummations of faith. Prophetic gleams of these consummations make

the spiritual seer rationally and triumphantly optimistic with regard to Creation, Providence, and Destiny. Why? Where? What? Why the crushing cruelties of creation? The travail of the world is to faith an unravelled perplexity. Yet a glimpse of the One from whom the universe emanated, fortifies faith against despondency, and rationalises the demands of conscience for a future of rectification and recompense. The solution of faith is not a speculative one, but a spiritually inevitable one. There is a vision of God that assures the soul that the sorrows and injustices of life can and will be harmonised with the righteousness and love of God. Why the incompleteness of life? The saintliest soul is separated by a virtual infinitude from the ravishing perfection that fills his imagination. The pauper is full of implications of eternity. If, after a few years on this planet, he is to rot for ever in the tomb, his noblest faculties are cruel excrescences.

“The facts of life confirm the hope  
That, in a world of larger scope,  
What here is faithfully begun  
Will be completed—not undone.”

The creation of a soul demands and ensures its continuity. Faith is morally coerced into the belief that the heir-apparent will some day be the crowned monarch. There is an insight which develops into foresight. An eminent disbeliever speaks of the Christian doctrine of immortality as "a balm for the wounded spirit, for which it would be hard to find an equivalent in all the treasures of philosophy, in all the repertoires of science." Apart from this doctrine, creation would represent a crime infinitely transcending in heinousness the most heartless devilry ever perpetrated by mortal man. But when will the justification and completion of life become realised facts? When will the readjustments and restorations which are morally imperative be brought to pass? Now, true faith is not like the Second Adventists:

"Impatient with the stars that keep their course  
And make no pathway for the coming Judge."

It glimpses the Divine purpose and intelligently acquiesces in the Divine plans. A vision of the grand climax inspires it with



confidence in the ultimate effectiveness of heaven's methods.

The processes of grace cannot be accelerated by arbitrary, external interference on the part of God. "The wilderness shall blossom as the rose," "God shall be all in all," are prophecies which are but very partially fulfilled. Yet, the spiritual results already achieved, justify faith in the power of God to achieve the glorious finale depicted in the Book. What will the ultimate outcome be? God "shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." Friends, our fears and frettings are a sad comment on our faith.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,  
And looks to that alone ;  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries 'It shall be done.'"

God grant this faith may be ours !





## WRONGING THE SOUL



## V

### WRONGING THE SOUL

“He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul.”—  
Prov. viii. 36.

“ME” in the text represents spiritual wisdom, which, in its ultimate meaning, is identical with revealed religion, or with God Himself. The words suggest to us the exquisite sensitiveness of Divinity. We can lacerate the heart of God because He is our Father. Our spiritual relationship with the Supreme makes it possible for us to wound His spirit and cloud His joy. Our cruellest foe cannot grieve us to the extent our own child can. To some, God is a Divine Vanderbilt, so inconceivably rich in love as never to miss the withheld affection of poor mortals on earth. But such views of God are directly opposed to the primal facts of revelation. Our sins affect God far more

deeply and grievously than we can conceive. Sin also injures the sinner to an alarming extent; and it is this fatal rebound of moral transgression on the sinner himself we wish to emphasise. Sin, after its immediate impact on God, recoils on the soul of its perpetrator with most awful results. The sensualist, the secularist, and the saint commit sins—greatly dissimilar in type—which wrong their souls as well as grieve their God.

I. The sins of sensualists are unspeakably tragic in their consequences. It is a sad fact that literature teems with apologies for licentiousness. Literary princes like Carlyle regard genius as an atonement for bestiality. Men like Goethe, guilty of disgraceful liaisons, must be excused the obligation of chastity; they are sublimely above the criticisms of prudish pietists. J. S. Mill, George Eliot, George Lewis, defied public censure, and persisted in their gross immoralities heedless of the purists who “flattened their noses against their window panes.” According to Chinese law, a certain class of offenders doomed to death are

permitted to strangle themselves with silken strings. How many of our poets, painters, sculptors, dramatists, have strangled their souls in this way ! Voluptuousness sapped the intellectual strength of Byron and despoiled his soul of its Divine sensibility. Burns is speaking from personal experience when he says :

“It hardens all within  
And petrifies the feeling.”

Ruskin assures us that the moral deformity of artists reflects itself on the canvas. Vanished stars might have waxed into perfect suns of art but for the secret corruptions that quenched their light. Is the Church as stern and uncompromising an antagonist to impurity as it is her duty to be ? Does she strenuously strive, not only to perform the practical duties of religion, but also to “keep herself unspotted from the world” ? God help us more intensely to realise that we cannot touch the leprous without contracting pollution ! When we meet the unclean, let us pass by on the other side, and without a nod of recognition.

This is the wisest and safest policy. As Sir Thomas Browne says, "Tempt not contagion by proximity." I am not addressing libidinous monsters, guilty of foul, passional excesses. None of my readers, I trust, observe the Sabbath by orgies of whisky and whist, or devote their week-evenings to salacious songs and lecherous dramas; yet, some of us may be unconsciously violating the laws of Christian purity by our tolerance of the obscene, by listening to the impure whisperings of Spencer, Arnold, Greg, by occasionally inhaling certain polluted atmospheres. Are not some of us in danger of ingeniously veiling the impurities of the great, and generously concluding that the saintliest souls are "all with speckles pied"? Christians sometimes affect a charity broader than Christ's, and gloss the damning faults of the clever and illustrious. God save us from this false liberalising of moral judgments! Let us rigidly exclude from our perusals and pastimes that which is provocative of the baser instincts! No mental fillip will atone for the slightest moral stain. Let us systematically ban the prurient,

however artistically refined or delicately served. The *broad* views of Christian parents may act with disastrous effect on the morality of their children. Godwin, and James Mill, advocated loose marital theories, and their offspring put their parents' creed into practice, and plunged into debauchery. A Christian mother once took her daughter to witness an obscene continental play, with the result that the daughter entered the theatrical profession and died in a brothel. Let the Church unhesitatingly condemn the tainted, and ever seek to purge our libraries, academies, and homes from everything that ministers to sensuality. The slightest concession to pruriency wounds the holy God, and works infinite mischief in our souls.

II. The sins of secularists impoverish and wrong the soul to an inconceivable degree. Men like Holyoake would substitute time for eternity, science for God, humanitarianism for Christ. As Milton says :

“New foes arise,  
Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.”

We are told that it is the highest wisdom

to pay exclusive attention to the demands of the present. Secular reason is our ultimate authority on all practical questions. We must study and solve the problems of time and leave the phantoms of eternity severely alone. We must not even "faintly trust the Larger Hope," nor allow the "now" of fact to be in the least degree shadowed by the "hereafter" of sentimentalism. Present ascertainable realities must engross our mental faculties. Nothing can enthrall and soothe the soul of man like the beauties and harmonies of Nature. This species of secularism finds in the present enough to engage, satisfy, and develop our sublimest powers, and regards the supplements of the future as hampering superfluities. We are further assured that science has eclipsed the Saviour as a practical benefactor of mankind; that the chemist of to-day exerts a greater influence on the progress of events than does the Christ of the New Testament; that we are more deeply indebted to electricity than we are to Providence. Again, we are told that the political world must be swept clean of all



theological prejudices. The highest duty of our legislators is to promote the improvement and happiness of the community. Religion is said to be obstructive of advance, so its absolute banishment is a highly desirable consummation. Now, we firmly believe that the universal adoption of godless secularism would result in mental deterioration and financial ruin. But what would be the result on morals? What would be the consequence on individual and national character of this absolute secularisation of life? Miss Martineau contends that the negation of the spiritual would result in sublimer ethics and purer lives; but history flatly and finally contradicts her teaching. The repudiation of religion invariably results in the perversion and degradation of the finer instincts and virtues. The ancient Pompeians rigidly excluded the Eternal, and satiated both body and soul with artistic temporalities; but this excessive gratification of the sensual ended in frightful immoralities and unnamable crimes. Saxony is, in many respects, the great nerve-centre of godless intellectualism; yet it has gained

unenviable distinction in depravity and rottenness. In France the lewder passions find their strongest stimulus and cleverest palliation in the literature that claims to be untainted by prudish Puritanism. No; the greatest constraint to virtue and the sublimest and only guarantee of morality is the Christianity of Christ. The most delicate flowers of love and purity cannot be preserved and brought to perfection of bloom and fragrance by constant exposure to the electric rays of atheistic science. These spiritual exotics, when denied the light of the Sun of Righteousness, soon decay and swarm with vermin. Men have climbed to the altitudes of fame without the inspiration of religion; but these pinnacles of notoriety are separated by countless leagues from those spiritual heights on which the saints of God dwell. Societies, with the keenest intellectual appetite, have become hopelessly wormeaten and gangrened. The substitution of the temporal for the eternal, the human for the Divine, invariably results in deterioration and death.

III. The sins of saints recoil with grievous

effect on their souls. There are religious severances, sublimations, sophistries, and suppressions enforced and practised by Christian communities with disastrous results. According to some, sacred and secular are absolutely distinct and opposed. Scholarship and saintship are mutually exclusive terms.

A modern Nonconformist minister publicly thanked God he had "never learned German." Another would not enter a drawing-room because a masterpiece of Turner embellished its walls. There are churches which suppress the intellect, and habitually ban the artistic as hostile to Christ. Men like Keble regard Biblical critics as "too wicked to be reasoned with." This arbitrary and ignorant exclusion of learning and art impedes the advance and neutralises the influence of religion to an alarming extent. Many refine Christianity into ethereal idealisations. These spiritual lapidaries are constantly submitting the diamond of the Divine word to the grinding-wheels of their morbid fancy. They are seeking a purer gem than the practical, perfect truth taught and embodied by Christ. They search for certainty

and strength in imaginary heights when the Rock of Ages is within hand-reach. This straining after the impracticable is deadly in its reflex effects on the soul. There are no higher virtues available than those practically exemplified by Christ. There are saintly sophists who advocate lying and persecution. Says one, "Make yourselves clear that you are justified in deception and then lie like a trooper." According to Augustine, Calvin, Fenelon, theft is not to be compared in offensiveness with heterodoxy. The Jesuitic casuistry, indulged in by members of secret unions in the Established Church, must be fatal to the instinct for integrity and truth. These ecclesiastical sophistries have "hair as the hair of women," but their teeth are as "the teeth of lions." They craftily deceive and cruelly devour. There are spiritual suppressions which dwarf and impoverish the soul. Saints of God have habitually stifled the instinct for self-sacrifice. They have selfishly devoured the viands of faith with little thought for the crumbless crowd. The treasures of spiritual art are often regarded as the exclusive property of the

privileged few. To sing the songs of the sanctuary in the slum would be sacrilege. The chirpings of gutter sparrows are good enough for the multitude, but saints alone can appreciate the songs of our cathedral aviaries. The lovely dahlias and carnations of religion are for the Church altar and conservatory ; they would die in the attic or the hospital. “ Corn of heaven . . . angels’ food ” is intended for the connoisseurs of the cloister and not for the palate of the pauper. The works of the great divines are systematically imprisoned in walnut cases. But these exclusions, refinements, sophisms, and selfishnesses gradually but surely volatilise the soul. The more perfect a musical instrument is, the more liable it is to derangement. There are astronomical mechanisms which the slightest touch of the hand will mar ; and the soul of the saint may be blighted and warped by the faintest impress of evil. Narrowness, fastidiousness, chicanery, self-absorption, are sins to which certain types of religious temperament are peculiarly prone, and they soil and dwarf the soul to an inconceivable degree. May God deliver us

all from prejudices and practices which impoverish the mind, wound the conscience, and strangle the noblest instincts of the heart !

“THE VISION THAT SUFFICETH”





## VI

### “THE VISION THAT SUFFICETH”

“Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”—JOHN xiv. 8.

PHILIP is here the mouthpiece of universal man. His words express the very central core of human need. There is nothing that can absolutely efface the sense of childhood from our consciousness. Yet, there are atmospheres in which the feeling of sonship becomes greatly weakened. In the cold light of scientific materialism the filial instinct well-nigh shrivels up. Christ is the supreme awakener of the impulses, aspirations, and affections of childhood in the soul. In Him the sense of sonship rose to its highest conceivable point. In His presence the feeling of God's loving paternity is deepened and intensified. Let those who are so keenly sensitive to the disintegrating

influence of critical unbelief get into closer personal contact with Him who said, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." History is full of pathetic corroborations of the statement—"No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Greek philosophy—the sublimest creation of the intellects of antiquity—failed to reveal the Father. Though the poet Cleanthes spoke of men as "His offspring," none of the sons of Hellas firmly grasped the affectionate Fatherhood of God—not even Æschylus their greatest theologian, nor Epictetus their greatest saint. Observation, generalisation, inductive inference may lead us with Agassiz, Cuvier, Mill, Darwin, and Spencer to a creative intelligence. Materialistic evolutionists say, "We can guide you to the genesis of life, and land you in the primitive nebula, but we have found no Father throughout the the whole domain of Nature." Nature has ever been in travail with the grand truth of God's Fatherhood, but mere science has not, as yet, registered its birth. Christ Himself is God's response to the cry of the text—"Show us the Father." A glimpse of the Divine

Fatherhood as revealed in Christ satisfies our mental, moral, and affectional aspirations.

I. A vision of the Father sufficeth for the mind. The mind finds no permanent satisfaction in the contemplation of its own creations and conclusions. Throw the figures of science and philosophy on the canvas, and let primordial atoms, glowing gases, ethereal abstractions pass before our gaze. While these are being unfolded to our view, our minds are pleading in plaintive undertones for another vision, and saying, “Show us the Father.” The “infinite and eternal energy at the back of things” can never be the mind’s final resting-place. Were man nothing but intellect, he is conscious intellect, and he cannot believe in the reign of unconscious, impersonal force, without strangling his rational instincts. The cry of the mind when rightly understood is, “Oh that I knew where I might find Him!” The peace and perfection of the intellect demand the distinctive doctrines of Christ. We quench the very Shekinah of our reason when we banish the Divine Fatherhood from its confines. The cry of the reason when rightly

interpreted is not for the absolute, but for the absolute Father. Our intellectual nature has its affections, which the fantastic mockeries of atheism cannot satisfy. This is why Christ commands us to love the Lord our God "with all our mind." Our deepest intellectual affinities are with the sublime truths of Christianity. We are guilty of mental sacrilege when we strip the reason of its evangelical instincts. By contemptuously consigning religion to the reign of emotion we deprive the mind of its divinest inspirations and loftiest delights. The evangelisation of the intellect is a great work to which the Church of the twentieth century must address itself. That a necessary chasm exists between the God of the head and the God of the heart is a transparent sophism. We degrade the mind when we compel it to worship at materialistic or agnostic shrines. The discernment of the Divine alone guarantees intellectual satisfaction and rest. Our religion is impregnable on its mental side when we see the Father. God help the Churches to explode the common error that Christ has nothing but the lath-and-plaster

fences of tradition and emotion between it and annihilation! No artillery has ever been invented that can demolish the mental citadel of the soul that discerns the Father. A day is coming when the prodigal intellect will be constrained to cry, “I will arise and go to my Father.” The only invulnerable intellectual position is that expressed in the words “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” The admissions of our kingly intellectualists are touching proofs of the fact that the mind’s peace is not in proportion to its brilliance. We need, as never before, spiritual specialists to correctly diagnose the mental diseases of the age. Our atheists and agnostics are the victims of fatal cerebral maladies. Thank God, our deranged intellectualists, who are under the spell of the deadly hallucination, “There is no God,” are not in an absolutely hopeless state. The Supreme Oculist can still make the blind to see. When God utters the omnipotent words “Let there be light,” there is light.

II. A vision of the Father sufficeth for the conscience. All attempts to discredit the New Testament doctrine of sin have been

signally abortive. The resources of scientific denial have been exhausted in the vain effort to annihilate our sense of sin. By no process of moral alchemy can vice be transformed into virtue. Never was belief in the heinousness and criminality of sin so smartly or severely satirised, and yet all that has been said and written in mitigation of human guilt will not permanently lessen the consciousness of it. Cries of anguish and wringing of hands demonstrate the failure of the hereditist to saddle men's guilt on their progenitors. Sin is felt to be sin, however assiduously the scientists and philosophers are whitewashing its nature and effects. The scarlet vein in our guilt remains in spite of all real and imaginary extenuations. The air is still rent by the anguished misereries of the self-condemned soul. The worm is not dead and the fire is not quenched.

By no process of self-discipline can we suffocate the smouldering fires of remorse. In vain do Fakirs and Dervishes, Stylites and Christian Flagellants torture themselves. No absolution pronounced by priest can efface the memories that burn and sting,



or avert the impending scourge. No self-reformation possible to man can obliterate the bitter past. Future mechanical obedience cannot change the irrevocable past; which often appears to the unforgiven soul as the vale of Sodom did to Abraham,—“And lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.” The devotions and mortifications of asceticism cannot quench the flames of a blazing conscience. Yet a vision of the Father creates an atmosphere round the soul in which the haunting spectres of merciless retribution fail to develop themselves. Radium and Röntgen Rays already stand discredited as infallible cures for that most terrible of all diseases—cancer; but there are no limits to the healing potency of that spiritual electricity—the Father’s love. The smile of God stimulates, pacifies, and rectifies the dull, distressed, deranged conscience; it unseals the fountains of moral compunction, and transforms the desert of despair into a garden of flowers. There are moral pathologists, who regard the sense of sin as morbidness, or the result of a “swollen conscience.” But a true consciousness of

guilt must not be identified with a possible hypersensitiveness which fills the air with the ghastly images of uncommitted crimes. The remorseful soul is not essentially neurotic. There are heartfelt sorrows which are at once absolute proof of the reality of spiritual disease, and hopeful signs of ultimate recovery. A vision of the Father reveals the ghastliness and turpitude of sin, and at the same time it inspires the soul with a quenchless hope of perfect deliverance from its guilt and power. Hope springs immortal in the breast of the man who is assured of the Father's forgiveness. Nothing can terrorise the soul who hears the Father say, "Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee." The thunder and lightning of justice cannot harm the man who is enfolded in the embrace of God.

"Though our sins as mountains rise,  
And swell and reach to heaven,"

it is enough to know that

"Mercy is above the skies,  
And we can be forgiven."

III. A vision of the Father sufficeth for the heart. A clever defendant of the



pure Christianity of Jesus has recently admitted that he would not like to be the Author of this rueful world. There is nothing that disturbs that state of equipoise between doubt and faith, and turns the scales in favour of unbelief, like the heart-rending sorrows of the world. Perhaps it is possible for some sensitive souls to exaggerate the sufferings of mankind. It is certain that many thoughtful minds habitually overlook the alleviations and compensations of life. But when the woes of man are neither minimised nor exaggerated they stand for racking mysteries which crush the faith of thousands. To satisfactorily “justify the ways of God with man” is beyond the capacity of the trained and cultured Christian scientist. Yet, there are visions vouchsafed to faith, which make confidence in the ultimate wisdom and beneficence of God rational and impregnable. In crises when the hardest stoicism gives way, and the pent-up passion of the soul bursts forth in uncontrollable grief, a glimpse of infinite love will keep the mind from crazing and the heart from breaking. When loved ones are

wasting away and our noblest ambitions with regard to them are dashed to the ground, how impotent are the mockeries of human philosophy to keep the reason from reeling and the mouth from blaspheming! A vision of God's face changes the moral complexion of every tragedy. It fringes the blackest mystery with glory, and transforms every calamity into a benediction. He who sees the Father cannot regard life as a machine from whose whirling wheels men are thrown off like fabric from the loom. Providential nuts are often hard to crack, but to the true Christian the kernel is always sweet. He who sees supreme love triumphs over inexorable fate.

Again, an intelligent grasp of God's Fatherhood inspires us with an invincible optimism with regard to the future. Is the immortality of the soul a fact or an illusion? There are cultivated minds that believe the odds are enormously against future existence; yet faith in the deathlessness of the soul is being gradually reinforced by the assurance of science. The doctrine of Weismann that the germ plasm

is potentially deathless is being wondrously corroborated. The continuity of force is practically established, and makes annihilation incredible. Death is transmutation, not destruction. But the certainty that death does not mean extinction does not satisfy us. What will be the ultimate issues of life in the great hereafter? A vision of the Father makes the hell of mediævalism absolutely intolerable. To the modern Christianised heart the crude presentations of punishments, which the old expounders of religion indulged in, have become incredible. The evils of the soul are not essentially irremediable. The parental solicitude of the God which Jesus revealed will remain unchangeable. The day will come when Abel will triumph over Cain. The last outcome of the processes of grace will satisfy the deepest yearnings of the moral universe. Glimpses of the Divine Fatherhood make the glorious consummations depicted in the Book not only possible, but inevitable. “He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.” And it is enough for us to know that, universally, “Good will be the final goal of ill.”



## SEEKING THE SUPREME



## VII

### SEEKING THE SUPREME

“Now set your heart and your soul to seek after the Lord your God.”—1 CHRON. xxii. 19.

WHAT is my moral bent? This question eclipses all others in intrinsic momentousness. Every man's sympathies incline either in the direction of the virtuous or the vicious, the temporal or the eternal. There is no ground of equipoise between these opposite tendencies. No man is in a state of balance between these rigid moral alternatives. Ethical determination in one direction or the other is forced upon all. The universe has but two poles, and we are consciously or unconsciously gravitating towards one or the other. Is the supreme purpose of our life to “seek the Lord”? Are our souls in the right inclination towards the Divine? There are three things necessary to the realisation of

the primary purpose of life—viz. personal decision in respect to the soul's bias, perfect detachment from what distracts mind and heart from the Highest, and persistent devotion to the things that are above.

I. We must personally decide the posture of the soul. The will can determine the bent of our life. We can put ourselves in a right or wrong relation to the eternal realities. Internal forces affect the climate of this planet far more than external influences. Changes in the barometer of the soul are largely the result of inward volition. We can elect to float on the current of public opinion, or to plough the mighty spiritual main in the bark of faith. Our wills can largely affect the practical resultant of the conflicting desires of our nature. We can acquiesce in the submergence of one faculty and in the triumph of another; or, we can interpose, and ally our will with one of these contending forces, and greatly modify if not actually determine the ultimate outcome. The weakest power, in confederation with the will, may gain the victory over the sturdiest passion. It is quite possible to



overemphasise the sovereignty of the will. We cannot by one act of volition cancel the evil influences of heredity and environment. Yet we possess a faculty which makes us responsible agents. We have a casting-vote. We can largely repress and attenuate the tendencies and desires of our lower nature, and, by wise and constant exercise and training, develop and perfect our loftier instincts. We firmly believe that the original inclination of the soul is Godward. As the poet says :

“ In our proper motion we ascend  
Up to our native seat.”

There is in physical nature an inner instinct ever urging it to rise to higher levels.

“ Every clod hath a stir of might,  
An instinct within that reaches and towers ;  
And grasping blindly above it for light  
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.”

The infusoria in the slimy abysses of the ocean are prompted by an inner principle to rise towards the sun. The cave-dweller yielded to the stimulations of the sky, and left his dismal cavern for the blue heavens. Even the savage has sympathies with the

supernatural. There is in him a promise and potency of splendid spiritual achievements. The deepest disposition in man is not demoniacal, but Divine. Our text does not exhort us to attempt the impracticable. Correspondence with this Divine environment is gloriously possible. This yielding to the attraction of the heavenlies is not a foolhardy experiment, like shooting Niagara in a patent barrel. Millions who have obeyed the Christian command, "Launch out into the deep," have been able to sing :

"Now I have found the ground wherein  
Sure my soul's anchor may remain."

Those who have truly and finally set their souls to seek the Lord have a constant consciousness of harbourage in the heart of God. There are ventures which end in catastrophe. The initial essays of the quickened soul are not free from danger. It is possible to sever ourselves from the seen to drift aimlessly in the unseen. And it is also possible for us

"Here on this bank in some way live the life  
Beyond the bridge."

Spiritual substances never turn out to be mirage. Those who commit themselves to the spiritual current are ever receiving overtures from the heavenly Canaan. They are "alone, yet not alone." However far they may have travelled into the unseen, they ever hear the voices of the souls in advance, bidding them follow on. Are we travelling towards the ravishing realities of the spirit world? Are we yielding to or resisting the attraction of the Divine? "Choose you this day whom you will serve." The sun is shining, but it rests with us whether we open or close the pores of our soul. The life-line is within hand-reach, we must grasp it or sink. God help us to wisely direct our power of volition and to set ourselves to seek after the Lord!

II. We must perfectly detach ourselves from everything that would restrain or suppress our Godward impulses. According to Christ, materialists, godless intellectualists, narrow ecclesiastics, are mere provincialists. They content themselves with navigating a village pond when they might sail the eternal sea.

There is a union with, and severance from, the world which is necessary to true progress in the direction of the spiritual. There is a solidarity and insularity which co-operate, like the centripetal and centrifugal forces of nature, in fixing the orbit of the soul. There is no essential incongruity between the loveliness of a landscape and the beauty of holiness. The material is not the repudiation, but the incarnation of the spiritual. The intellectual and the religious are not essentially discordant. The reason is a string in the harp of the soul which may be brought into tune with the Infinite. Yet the phenomenal must not be allowed to take precedence over the permanent. The soul suffers eclipse and deterioration by exclusive alliance with the physical and evanescent. It is sacrilegious and suicidal to imprison the soul within the walls of "ism" or allow the cathedral dome to hide the heavenlies from our view. Our minds demand the unhorizoned for their museum, laboratory, and gymnasium. The "cribbed, cabined, and confined" instincts of the parochialist cry for the cosmopolitan and the illimitable.

But what most of us have to guard against is not absolute immersion in the material, but delicate concessions and slight inclinations to that which impedes our progress sunward. The almost imperceptible fissure in the Alpine glacier often widens into an impassable gulf; small departures from true spirituality may broaden into fatal chasms. We can gradually and unconsciously animalise and stultify the soul by minute compromises with worldliness. Goethe says "Our blessings are our greatest curses." Shakespeare reminds us of the craft and subtlety of certain sins :

"And oftentimes to win us to our harm  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths."

There are artistic studies and religious conventionalities, legitimate and harmless in themselves, which Christians of certain temperaments must absolutely renounce. Angelico, the great friar-painter, who, according to Ruskin, expressed "the sacred affections upon the human countenance as no one ever did before or since," felt it his duty to religiously exclude the secular. In every

age there have been path-finders and frontiersmen who have courageously snapped the fetters that bound them to the stationary and conventional, in order to explore the unknown. It was a psychological moment, fraught with untold possibilities, in the life of John Wesley when he burst the bonds of tradition and abandoned false ecclesiasticism for true spiritualism. Dr. Drummond says, "It is only limitation which can secure the illimitable." And again, we must "oppose to death the perpetual larceny of our life by trifles." There is a legend to the effect that when an angel visits this planet and stays seven days in it, he becomes coarsened and incapable of flight. God help us to shun impoverishing alliance with the secular! Let us allow nothing to limit the range of our spiritual activities and aspirations. The rays of the sun diminish in their effect as their obliquity increases; the influence of spiritual substances is attenuated by slight leanings toward sensuous shadows. May the Lord aid us to detach ourselves not only from the flagrantly bad, but also from those studies and pleasures—



legitimate in themselves—the pursuit and indulgence of which would be harmful to us!

III. We must persistently devote ourselves to the crowning purpose of life—the acquisition of the Divine. The passion for God must sway us with resistless domination. There are two essential conditions of progress in the apprehension and realisation of the Divine—courage and concentration. Let us set our face steadfastly towards the heavenly Jerusalem. The true progressionist must harden himself against the sneers and denunciations of stationary conservatives. John Wesley, in refusing submission to ecclesiastical law, was obeying a more imperious commandant within him. Christ, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross. Crucifixion was the Jewish penalty not only for falling below the level of public morality, but, as in the case of Christ, for infinitely transcending it. According to one writer, ecclesiastical potentates are singularly deficient in courage. They are the living representatives of Seneca, whom Carlyle calls “the father of all such as wear shovel hats.” Seneca extolled self-sacrifice, and, as some

would have us believe, loaded to Nero for selfish ends. A modern writer assures us that "since Atterbury no occupant of an English See has really risked place for principle." But what about ourselves? Are we courageously suppressing or sacrificing everything that retards our advance Godward? Can we say with Paul, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ"? The true artist will part with miles of canvas for a yard of Raphael. Are we willing to part with our favourite "ecclesiastical orchid" for the sake of the Rose of Sharon? Are we steadily climbing the mountain of holiness, regardless of the jeering crowd at its base? God help us to sacrifice the high for the Highest. We cannot passionately seek the pure gold of Eternal Truth without becoming spiritual Vanderbilts.

Another essential element of spiritual aggrandisement and expansion is concentration. We must focus our gaze on transcendent realities. The soul must become "God-intoxicated." We can be so enamoured of the Divine loveliness as to become its



“willing thralls.” When entranced with the enchantments of the spiritual, it is easy to resist the magic of the material. “The glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.” Can we say with the Apostle, “But one thing I do”? Are all the powers within us in mutual league and wisely coadjusted for the glorious destinies achievable by them? The full satisfaction and perfection of the soul is bound up with the harmony and co-operation of its aims and faculties. The complex forces of our personality must act in unison. Let the sublimities of the unseen keep all the powers of the soul in constant and harmonious activity. Religion is not a cult for certain specific attributes of our nature; it should engage and absorb every power with which we are endowed. “Hear, O Israel, . . . thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, and mind, and strength.” Whole-souled consecration to the Highest will end in perfect union with, and conscious possession of, the Highest. Let us make the knowledge and love of God the commanding motive of our life.

Consuming love for the Supreme will result in ravishing realisations of His grace and glory. Then let us as never before set our heart and our soul to seek after the Lord our God.

## APOSTOLIC SPECIALISM



## VIII

### APOSTOLIC SPECIALISM

“But one thing I do.”—PHIL. iii. 13.

PAUL was a true spiritual specialist. He had wonderfully developed the sense of proportion. He wisely discriminated between the better and the best, and reasonably concluded that the high must be renounced when it interferes with the Highest. He recognised a permanent incompatibility between the good and the bad, but he did not depreciate legitimate temporalities as contemptible and worthless. He did not regard matter and spirit as rival opposites, or absolute contradictions. To him they were correlated and co-ordinated. He did not, like many modern Christians, suffer from a narrow understanding. By making the spiritual the supreme duty and quest of life, he was acting in accordance with the dictates of the loftiest

wisdom. Paul was altogether free from the spirit which "distorts God's real proportions." We do not find in his writings a complete inventory of the things which must be renounced; we know he excluded everything not in harmony with that spiritual perfection the vision of which swayed him with constant domination. As seer, saint, and evangelist, he was thrilled with the transcendent possibilities of the individual. He perceived, pursued, and preached the Highest.

I. He personally perceived the Highest. Before him there stretched a grand vista of endless progress towards peace and perfection. Poets and philosophers have held widely divergent views with regard to the crowning prize of life.

Pindar, the Grecian poet, would have us believe that the enjoyment of prosperity is what is first to be desired. Yet we read of men dying millionaires, and at the same time execrated spiritual paupers. "Who knocks?" asked the angelic doorkeeper of Paradise, when Alexander sought to enter. "Alexander," was the reply. "Who is Alexander?" The answer came, "Alexander—*the* Alexander:

Alexander the Great—the conqueror of the world.” Said the angel, “We know him not; this is the Lord’s gate, only the righteous enter here.” How the world errs in its estimates of true greatness! Napoleon, the brave and brilliant commandant, is universally styled “the great;” yet, what infinite pathos and tragedy are suggested by his own words when a prisoner in St. Helena—“Behold the destiny of him who has been called the great Napoleon.” This towering colossus was a dwarf compared with a true Christian. When shall we awake to the inherent grandeur, the Divine endowments, and the lofty destiny of the human soul? Apollo says, “Know thyself.” To what heights of spiritual excellence is it possible for us to attain? Do Savonarola, Francis of Assisi, Mazzini, Livingstone stand for the grand consummation for which we were created? No; these represent but prophetic gleams of that transcendent perfection which God has designed for us. They stand for initial stages in the endless progress towards the heavenly ideal which ravished the soul of Paul. According to the Apostle, the individual may

attain unto "a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Christ was the transcendent goal of Paul's aspiration. The summit of true spiritual ambition is Christlikeness. A loftier aim is inconceivable, a lower would be a derogation of our manhood. Thousands of Christians are retarding their growth and impoverishing their souls by aiming at ends immeasurably below the highest. They are seeking precious pearls, but not the peerless pearl. There is a type of religious specialism which is unspeakably disastrous in its effect. A well-known botanist assures us that "most of the faults of flowers are only exaggerations of some right tendency." There are Christians who regard "orthodoxy" as the premier good. They are impassioned defenders of the letter of the law, and habitual stranglers of its spirit. Others strain after an otherworldliness which is identical with narrowness, fastidiousness, angularity. This excessive culture of particular virtues will never end in that symmetrically developed personality which was the crowning ambition of Paul. One has said, "It is the altitudes



that make us climbers." Let us steadily scale the mountain of holiness till we reach the summit whereon Christ dwells ! Let the beckoning heights quicken our aspirations, and may our gaze and motion be ever upward ! No unrealisable spiritual ideal is ever disclosed to the soul. God's revealed intention with regard to us is not a Divine masterpiece of art hung on the walls of our imagination for our dreamy delight ; the unveiled purpose of God is performable. " See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount."

"What is our calling's glorious hope  
But inward holiness !"

May we all be able to say with sincerity :

"For this to Jesus I look up  
I calmly wait for this !"

It is of supreme importance clearly to apprehend what God has designed us to become.

II. He persistently pursued the Highest. Emerson says, "The one prudence in life is concentration, the one evil is dissipation." Stars of literature might have expanded and intensified into brilliant suns had they

observed the supreme law of life—concentration. According to Carlyle, John Stirling habitually ignored this law, with the result that his genius was like sheet-lightning, more flashy than effective. Paul focussed his vision on his transcendent destiny in Christ. The bent of the Divine personality was originally determined by perfect wisdom and love, and it will remain unchangeable through all eternity. God Himself “commits His energy to unswerving lines, and keeps the track with eternal patience.” Paul personally decided the posture of his soul, and rigidly retained it in spite of opposing winds and contrary gravitations. Yet he was a prudent specialist. The one thing he aimed to realise included, transformed, and consecrated all other types of good. The sun does not efface the stars though it eclipses them; religion does not exclude science though it sanctifies and corrects it. Herschel and Faraday did not suffer scientifically because of their piety. The unearthly telescope must not be regarded as the natural enemy of the practical plough. The etherealisations of astronomy perfect and sublime the practi-

calities of earth; the celestial determines and reveals the terrestrial. As a certain writer puts it, "Even ladies' hats are trimmed astronomically." The spiritual does not annihilate, but comprehends, conserves, and completes secular good. Yet Paul realised the absolute sovereignty of the spiritual. He distinguished between the supreme and the relative, the essential and the legitimate, and wisely concluded that the Divine must always be dominant. The comparative must always be subordinated to the truly superlative. The wise merchantman, with trained instincts, sold all his inferior gems and bought the "pearl of great price." There are occasions when the precious jewels of earth must be sacrificed for the incomparable gem of Christian character. Oriental stars are eclipsed and superseded by the Sun of Righteousness. India, Persia, and China are exhorted to accord to Christ, the Sun of suns, pre-eminence over all local and tribal lights. It is pathetically true that "the good is often the enemy of the best." The good becomes bad when it captures our being and makes us indifferent or irresponsible to the

Highest. Are we, like Paul, ready to sacrifice all that we may realise our glorious destiny in Christ Jesus? Are we willing to part with our intellectual roses and artistic dahlias, and to clear out our conservatories for the sake of the Lily of the Valley? Are we strenuously striving to make our calling and election sure? Is the "one thing" aimed at by Paul the imperious and crowning concern of our souls? Are we seeking that true otherworldliness which the Scriptures sanction and stimulate? God help us to renounce the many things that compete tenaciously with the "one thing needful"! The highest prize of life is personal holiness.

"Howe'er it be, it seems to me  
'Tis only noble to be good."

Ravished with the beauty of holiness, no vacillations or inconsistencies of aim will mark our life.

"Human strength and human greatness  
Spring not from life's sunny side;  
Heroes must be more than driftwood  
Floating on a waveless tide."

Let us fearlessly steer our cruise heavenward, looking unto the One who is the Author and

Finisher of our faith. He who prayerfully and patiently pursues the mark of the prize of his high calling will secure it, and his joy will be full.

III. He passionately preached the Highest. Arctic explorers assure us that the Gulf Stream affects the sea at the North Pole. Paul discerned rays of original righteousness in the darkest centres of heathendom. This rationalised and intensified his missionary enthusiasm. Huxley, the philosopher, and Paul, the evangelist, are absolutely at variance here. The former regarded evil as primal and organic; Paul looked upon it as artificial and temporary. To the Apostle, redemption was not arbitrary interference with the ordinary course of nature, but a progressive restoration of the world to its original integrity and purity. Paul fully recognised the disastrous and universal effects of sin; yet sin to him was a foreign element, warring against his more real and profounder self. Nature herself might say with truth, "I, yet not I, but sin which dwelleth in me." The deepest and most essential thing in the personality of the most depraved is righteousness.

Were Paul preaching to-day to the citizens of our city slums, the possibility of personal perfection would be his transcendent theme. This zealous and true perfectionist would exasperate some modern congregations. "Hysterical," "mythical," "impractical," and even more opprobrious epithets would represent the verdicts of some of his hearers. Certain it is the model preacher would not substitute secular progress for spiritual perfection. He would consult his hearers' needs rather than their wishes. To those who required a sign, or clamoured for wisdom, he would say, "I am determined to know nothing among men save the perfection of personality through redeeming grace." It is *not* true that his spiritual descendants in the twentieth century "waste" the energies of mind and heart on the unverifiable, or are heedless or ignorant of the problems which painfully press on the mind of the multitude. Modern representatives of Paul are not pursuers of phantoms; neither are they deficient in sympathy for the suffering and downtrodden. It is to these we must look for the grandest exhibitions of self-sacrificing



philanthropy, and not to the champions of materialism. The supreme aim of true preaching, according to Paul, is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." May our pulpit ministrations ever bear testimony to the unique eminence of man! God help the religious teachers of the day clearly to discern the image of the Divine in the pariah as well as in the prince, in the pauper as well as in the poet! Let not the weltering putrescence of the times unnerve or paralyse the ambassadors of heaven! Underneath the scepticism and the degeneracy is the promise and potency of spiritual perfection. Let the fire of apostolic optimism burn in the preacher's veins. "Blessed are those who heal us of our own self-despisings." Quenchless hope in the pulpit is bound to affect sad despair in the pew. "I could see you were affected this morning," said one friend to another as they returned home from a Scottish kirk. "Yes," was the answer, "I felt exactly as I did when I recently visited Madame Tussaud's chamber of horrors." Let all public expounders of religion be first impassioned proclaimers of the sinner's spiritual

possibilities. Special sins must be denounced ; social economy and international politics must not be ignored. Pauline practicalities such as, "Husbands, love your wives," and "Masters, render unto your servants that which is just," must be enforced, but the glorious destiny possible to every man through the redeeming grace of God must in all things have the pre-eminence.



THE SURVIVAL OF THE SOUL



## IX

### THE SURVIVAL OF THE SOUL

“If a man die, shall he live again?”—JOB xiv. 14.

THOMAS CARLYLE says that religion should be the most certain of all our certainties. Can the veil which hangs over our futurity be pierced? Prayers and tears have failed to wring from Nature a satisfactory answer. The granite bastions, behind which Nature conceals her secret, defy the cannons of logic and science. If the question of the text is unanswerable, the Fatherhood of God is a sentimental fatuity, and the creation of man a black crime which nothing can justify or palliate. Nothing arrests the growth, and neutralises the influence of the Christian, like a flickering, fading faith in immortality. Nothing impoverishes our labours for humanity like a waning vision of life to come. The Christian doctrine of

immortality is the only unfailing spring of true optimism. Without it some of the best institutions of society would not survive a century. It has given to the world a new estimate of man; it has enhanced his dignity and value. The Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Puritans, and other martyrs and patriots, whose sacrifices for man and truth have clothed them with imperishable renown, were inspired and sustained by this doctrine. Our peace, progress, and the success of our practical activities largely depend on a firm faith in future life.

I. What is the answer of consciousness? We believe with Emerson that we carry the pledge of eternal life in our own hearts. "For ever" is ineffaceably written on the walls of the soul. As E. B. Browning says, the original inscription may be covered by human wrtinigs, but it is never absolutely erased. That man is immortal is the ever-growing conviction of the true psychologist. The rich findings of introspective science are changing hope into certainty. The ultimate basis of faith in endless existence is internal. When man is rightly read, his

extinction is unthinkable. Brethren, are you the conscious possessors of "the power of an endless life"? Can you say with George Macdonald, "I came from God, and I am going back to God, and I won't have any gaps of death in the middle of my life"? Reason, conscience, and heart are accredited presagers of immortality. The mechanism of the mind, the constituents of conscience, the hopes of the heart, imply the existence of a loving Father, Who is "too wise to err, and too good to be unkind." A ray of light necessitates the existence of the measureless sun; the glimmerings of reason are irresistible proofs of a primal intelligence. "He that teaches man knowledge, shall He not know?" That conscience is an emanation from the Supreme Spirit is not a groundless fiction of belated piety. "He that formed the eye, shall He not see?" represents an argument which is growing in cogency and irresistibleness as the ages roll on. He who divests his Deity of the attributes of personality is a reactionary of a very dangerous type. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We believe in the reliability of

the Christian consciousness. "If a man die, shall he live again?" Yes, because the readjustments and recompenses of immortality are necessary to justify creation. Yes, because we hear the muffled sound of the eternal sea, and receive overtures from the realm of the blessed. Yes, because our Father is ever urging us to set our minds on "the things that are above." What eternal blessedness will consist in we cannot adequately grasp. The realisation will transcend our loftiest anticipations. When the boy Roland sat on King Charlemagne's knee and asked him what his future inheritance would be, the potentate grew silent and grave. The believer is heir to a bliss and glory which thrill and awe the imagination. The New Testament conception of immortality alone can satisfy the cravings of mind, conscience, and heart. God lures our spirit forward by filling it with visions of a realm where Humboldt, who died at ninety, saying, "Oh for another hundred years!" will have eternity to prosecute and perfect his studies. "In Memoriam" exists, but is Tennyson dead? The Sistine Madonna

lives, but is Raphael nothing but dust? Because God is what He is, Christian immortality is not only reasonable, but also a divinely inevitable consummation.

II. What is the answer of culture? The consciousness of immortality is intensest in the purest and most exalted souls. Professor Tyndale tells us that it was in his loftiest and most inspired moments that the vision of life to come was clearest. Dante, Milton, Pascal, had moods in which the ordinary arguments for eternal life seemed superfluous. When the mind emerges from the swaddling bands of infancy and develops wings, the probability of a future life intensifies into an irrepressible intuition. The hope of immortal life burns most steadily and brightly in those over whom superstition has least influence. The tendency of true culture is to strengthen conviction in the naturalness and necessity of a future life. A century ago immortality was not so intellectually probable as it is to-day. Those who live on the lofty table-lands of Peru have developed abnormally strong chests, and those who dwell on the dizzy heights of



science do not find the air irrespirable to Christian faith. On the contrary, the atmosphere of these altitudes develops their spiritual lungs to a marvellous degree. Herbert Spencer assures us that the great correcter and purifier of religion is science. Evolution has done more for theology than for any other science; it has exalted and illumined with electric rays our conception of God. The Christian scientist worships an unspeakably sublimer Deity than the God of the ordinary believer. We believe with Henry Drummond, that "every step of science discloses the attributes of the Almighty with a growing magnificence." Now, the cogency of the argument for immortality depends on the purity and loftiness of our conception of God. Has this glorious Deity, disclosed by science, and who is inconceivably "greater than our hearts," destined humanity for the charnel-house? Developed and sanctified reason answers with a sevenfold thundering "No." Thank God that annihilation is growing more intolerably repugnant as true science advances. Let us for ever dispossess our minds of the fatal



fallacy that the advance of knowledge is a menace to faith. Science has passed through ordeals which have increased its respect for religion; to-day it is not a dogmatic atheist, but a trembling agnostic. Mr. Huxley, on purely scientific lines, came into almost actual contact with palpitating spiritual realities. Though science does not guarantee immortality, it adds elements of grandeur to our views of God; it reveals the sublimities of our nature, and the potentialities of the universe; it inspires faith with a noble and triumphant confidence. My young brethren, let us familiarise ourselves with the thoughts and experiences of the saintly sages of our own times. Let us wrestle with these spiritual intuitionists, and, though like Jacob our thighs be smitten, our faith will be invigorated and religious experience enriched. The telescope and the microscope not only expand our mental horizon, but they also deepen and sublime our moral convictions. Insight into fact should gloriously aggrandise faith. The truth expressed by Browning—

“A worm that loves within its clod  
Is better than a loveless God—”

should appeal to us with glowing irresistibility. I have far more cogent and impregnable reasons for believing that "God is love," and that "our citizenship is in the heavens," than I had when I commenced my public ministry.

III. What is the answer of Christ? He who would build an edifice in Jerusalem must dig through many yards of rotting relics of ancient structures; he who would build his hope of immortality on the ultimate and eternally sure basis, must bore through many strata of sentiment, tradition, reason, and lay the foundation stone on the personal Christ. The Son of God has "brought life and incorruption to light." In the atmosphere of His presence we are made conscious of the reality and everlastingness of our affinities with Him, and discern a new meaning in the words "Because I live, ye shall live also." The fact that Christ lives guarantees the eternal preservation of the believer's personality. The climatic changes, which physicists assure us have befallen this earth, are big with spiritual significance. Labrador, the land of Polar

icebergs, was once a tropical region. Christians whose souls once pulsated with transcendent hopes are to-day in a low, devitalised condition. Once Christ, their Sun, was perpendicular, but they changed their inclination towards this Supreme Orb, and to-day from their oblique position they catch but a few slanting rays of light. "If a man die, shall he live again?" I know the answer of those whose souls are in the right inclination towards the Sun. The nearer we get to Christ, the more absolute grows our certainty of immortality. The crude superstitions which mark the age of Pythagoras are gone. Much of the maudlin sentimentality of the nineteenth century is passing away, but the persistence of the belief in the "life and incorruption" brought to light by Christ is guaranteed. Friend, is the light of hope fading in the dazzling glare of the actual? Commune with Christ, drink in His Spirit, become transfigured with His rays, and your soul will throb and thrill with a sublime assurance that your home is not the tomb. Tennyson was on the mount of transfiguration when he penned the lines :

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“For though from out our bourne of time and place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.”

There is nothing that would affect our age more gloriously than a deeper resignation and a more triumphant hope in the death-chamber and at the open grave. God forbid that we, who bear the name of Christ, should sorrow as those who have no hope! In moments of lofty inspiration we are human, and feel with the poet:

“Ah, Christ, that it were best  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be.”

But though we see not our dear departed ones, we know that they are for ever with the Lord, and in God's good time we shall join them.

“I go to prove my soul,  
I see my way as birds their trackless way;  
I shall arrive! what time, what circuit,  
I ask not; but unless God sends his hail  
Or blinding fireballs, sleet, or stifling snow,  
In good time, His good time, I shall arrive.  
He guides me and the bird. In His good time.”

## SPIRITUAL DEFICIENCIES



## X

### SPIRITUAL DEFICIENCIES

“What lack I yet?”—MATT. xix. 20.

IT is scarcely possible for the Church to ask herself a more pertinent question than this. Her comparative ineffectiveness implies a serious lack in her spirit, method, and ideals. What are the defects which neutralise her influence, and impede her advance? Why are the ministrations of the different religious communities to the intellectual and spiritual needs of our contemporaries so ineffectual? What is wanting to make the Church more equal to the tremendous tasks that confront her? But the question of the text is a personal one. The spirit of this young ruler was scarcely that of the self-satisfied Pharisee. We think his words imply a sense of need, a consciousness of imperfection. And are we not ourselves haunted by a sense of incapacity

and unworthiness? Are we not often constrained to ask in our impotence, "Why could not we cast him out?" What explains the vast interval between the average twentieth-century Christian and the Apostle Paul? There are three things we should persistently seek,—deeper roots, broader sympathies, higher aims.

I. Deeper roots represent our supremest need. Let our piety be rooted in eternal righteousness and love. Many a shallow Christian is adept in the art of pruning. Christian energy is exhausted in suppressing redundant foliage, and in lopping off the branches of worldly ambitions and sordid motives. The husbandman tells us that there are natural roots which defy his scythe and hoe; and there are weeds which grow on our motives and affections which no implement of the mere moralist can extirpate. Let the roots of our soul pierce to the Divine soil! Let us aim at cleanliness in the depths rather than at polish on the surface. The profounder our piety, the freer it will be from the malignant germs and fatal fungi which destroy the tissues of the soul.



He "shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon." Deeper affinities with God would gloriously affect our spiritual power, progress, and peace. A deeper consciousness of the grandeur and sacredness of the mind would vastly increase our power of thought. The mind must be taught self-reverence, and clearly apprehend its relationship to the Supreme Intelligence. Many Christians are superstitiously afraid to think. That the cultivation of the mind would chill or extinguish the emotions of the heart is a fallacy which has insinuated itself into the religion of thousands. An intense realisation of the essential oneness of the human and Divine mind would render our faith impregnable from an intellectual point of view. The reason for the hope that is within us would grow unspeakably more cogent and irresistible. A more deeply rooted religious life would greatly increase the authority of the conscience, the imperiousness of the will, and the sanctity of the affection. It would also make us more fearlessly and wisely progressive in spirit and method. The constraints to self-sacrifice would become

moral compulsions. The advance of the soul towards perfection would be greatly accelerated. The crawler would be transformed into a strong and swift athlete, and would be able to say with the Psalmist, "I will run the way of Thy commandments." Our peace is dependent on the soul's vision and grasp of the profounder realities of religion. Many Christians practically acquiesce in the saying of Renan, "There are only surfaces in humanity." Superficiality accounts for their tremors, distractions, and misgivings. Their religion is a mere cutaneous affection, and is easily staggered by the prognostications of unbelief. Many social structures have collapsed because their builders have based them on conventional sands. The believer whose hopes are grounded on mere tradition or ecclesiasticism may well tremble with premonition of coming discomfiture and ruin. The flowers that grow on the summits of Alpine crags bloom and shed their fragrance in spite of drought and storm. Souls rooted in the Rock of Ages are securer from blight than the dahlias and carnations of convention, planted in earth's

richest soil. We have known Christians mourning and wringing their hands because a few ecclesiastical chimney-pots have been blown away. These fail to discriminate between Christian fundamentals and the edifices of indifference which the Church has built on these. The critical destructionist may tear away the flummeries of form with which the mere "ceremonialist" bedecks his religion, but he cannot harm the faith of him who can truly say:

"Now I have found the ground wherein  
Sure my soul's anchor may remain."

He who glimpses the Divine Fatherhood will persist in believing in Universal Brotherhood, and his faith will gradually rise into the majestic stillness of absolute certainty. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." He is in league with Omnipotent Beneficence, and his original motives and constraints are being perpetually freshened and strengthened. Let us earnestly pray for profounder affinities with the Supreme. Surface Christians alone can suffer from spiritual paralysis and

agonising fears. A more deeply based confidence in Jehovah is the only cure for that *atra cura* which is quenching the Church's hope.

II. Broader sympathies should mark our spirit and conduct. Many of us are creedists rather than Christians. We immure the Infinite within ecclesiastical bounds; the sky of truth is contracted to the dimensions of a cathedral dome; evangelical zeal is regulated by denominational rules. The first aim of many is to fortify themselves in orthodoxy, rather than to know the truth. They are mere theological cave-dwellers. They feel at home in the primitive tents of doctrine, and instinctively shrink from the roomier world disclosed by science. How suggestive are the words of Pascal, "The eternal silence of the infinite spaces terrifies me!" Let legalists, sectarians, and religious provincialists renounce the "penny-shows" of dogmatism in favour of the glorious panoramas of infinite truth. Christianity incomparably surpasses our verbal definitions of it. The telescope has expanded our spiritual horizon. Let us seek to acclimatise

our souls to this new spiritual infinitude. An intenser realisation of the truth of the words "The kingdom of God is within you" would broaden our charity and Christianise our judgments. According to some who bear the name of Christ, the greatest sin against the Holy Ghost is entering a Non-conformist place of worship. Thousands regard heresy as the most crimson of crimes. Doctrinal delinquencies eclipse in heinousness all the atrocities recently committed by the Turks. God forbid that ecclesiastical prejudices should hold the reins of our personal sympathies! Let every true Christian fervently pray for broader love. Comparatively few aim at completeness of character. Many Christians spend their time and energy in raking, manuring, and cultivating isolated fringes of their personality. Some are expert in mysticism, but almost worthless amateurs in Christian practicalities. They pique themselves on their ascetic virtues, and habitually suppress the instincts of brotherhood.

"To meet the glad with joyful smiles,  
And wipe the weeping eyes,"



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represents an elementary stage of the Christian life which they have long outgrown. May God make us consummate masters in doing as well as in dreaming! Let us spend and be spent in the service of the Master rather than exhaust our souls in the pursuit of dreamy ideals. Let us "add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity," rather than distort and impoverish our souls by aiming at the fanciful graces and affectations of strained pietism. There are positivists who aim at a morality which is supposed to eclipse that enforced by Christ and His Apostles. God save us from the fatal folly of pursuing the bizarre, the ethereal, the unpractical! "Be ye therefore imitators of God." Let us copy the Holy One, Who "delighteth in mercy"; the sternly righteous One, of Whom it is said, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Let Christian breadth and tolerance mark our practical conduct. How many professors of religion can truly say with John

Wesley, "The longer I live, the larger allowances I make for human infirmities"? We are sadly deficient in true catholicity. We are quick to discern signs of spiritual declension in our neighbour. "Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not," but *we* know. There are streaks of evangelical gold even in the mire and clay of popish corruption, but we often fail to perceive them. Let us pray that our branches may spread over all sectarian palisades and paltry prejudices. God help us to recognise the Divine lineaments even in the most heterodox and fanatical! A modern preacher tells us that "As long as a man is his own centre all other men are his antagonists." When God becomes our centre all men will be regarded as brethren. May God enlarge our hearts, and deliver us from the narrowness and selfishness that have too often marked our spirit and action!

III. Higher aims should characterise our Christian life. We should seek to become more competent spiritual wrestlers. Our devotional exercises are indulged in a perfunctory spirit, and fail to develop the

muscular organisms of the soul. The results of our petitions are sad comments on our mechanical and passionless prayers. We are not the successful spiritual telegraphists we are designed to be. It is only at very rare intervals that we are "caught up into Paradise." Our vision is not constantly focussed on the transcendent. Our prayers do not always fly on wings as eagles; often they rise no higher than the church roof. Even in the very act of devotion our supremest powers are often suppressed. The state of our spiritual lungs is sufficient proof that we do not habitually inhale the ozone of Heaven. "The energised prayer of a righteous man is of great force." It is infinitely more than an "emotional safety-valve"; it is a spiritual force that can move the omnipotence and heart of Deity. "If ye abide in Me, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." May God make us mighty intercessors like the Apostle James, whose knees were "worn hard like the knees of a camel"! We should strive to cultivate the rarer blooms and exotics of character. There are incomparable orchids which are not



recognised by mere moralists and philosophers. There is a species of goodness which immeasurably transcends the conventional type. Souls, destined for spiritual distinction, die mediocres through worldliness and indolence. Their spiritual conservatories do not include the all-eclipsing virtues of a Paul; their piety is not conspicuous by incomparable fervidness and fragrance. Christian holiness stands for a subtler and more exquisite form of loveliness than is ever exhibited by the strictest legalists. Let us strenuously seek the realisation of that matchless purity possible through Divine grace. Let us aim higher than the world's highest, ever bearing in mind that personal embodiment of the unrivalled virtues of Christianity is contingent upon prayerful persistence. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Let us tax our powers to the utmost to preserve and perfect the divinest within us.

Lastly, we should aim at absolute unity of purpose. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name." Of very few Christians can it be said that they are constantly and completely

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absorbed in the Divine. It is not often that the composite powers of the believer's soul act in perfect unison. Religion demands the consecrated association of all the faculties of our being. The direst spiritual consequences are often the result of the attitude of one lethargic or disloyal instinct. A sleeping sentinel is often responsible for the pillaging and devastation of the soul. Let us constantly aim at not merely the possession of spiritual principles, but also their harmonious development and inviolable confederation. Perfection is impossible to the soul whose powers are not intelligently and sacredly leagued together to accomplish the best and embody the highest. Further, the absence of pitiful distractions and opposing elements must not be regarded as the supreme aim of life. Conflicting impulses must not only be harmonised, but dominated by the truly sovereign attribute of our nature—love. There must be the coadjustment and co-operation of all the faculties of our being, and also the loyal submission of each to the supremacy of the Highest. Let love become increasingly imperious, and let all its behests

be obeyed with perfect loyalty and wholeheartedness. May God create within us a profounder sense of our spiritual deficiencies, and make us mightier instruments for the accomplishment of His purpose! May He deepen our love, widen our influence, and elevate and sanctify our ambitions! May His grand designs with regard to us as individuals and churches be gloriously realised!



## CHRISTIAN INDEBTEDNESS



## XI

### CHRISTIAN INDEBTEDNESS

“I am debtor.”—Rom. i. 14.

A DEEPER and intenser sense of indebtedness is one of our greatest needs. He who calls himself a Christian increases his obligations a thousandfold. The beneficent activities of him who bears the name of Christ must far transcend those inspired by natural humanitarianism. Matthew Henry is unquestionably right in asserting that “Christianity is more than morality.” Our debt is proportional to our gifts and resources. If Christ is ours we are spiritual millionaires, and our self-sacrificing services must far eclipse those of mere moralists. “What do ye more than others?” The practical benevolence of the poor Christian must infinitely surpass in loftiness and range that of the wealthy, worldly philanthropist.



The goodness of the believer must outshine that of the ordinary altruist as the sun the star. Is our love for our kind incomparably superior in intensity and effectiveness to that of the mere humanitarian? The duty of the Christian is to be measured not by "the world's coarse thumb and finger," but by the Word of God. Are we conscious of the responsibilities which personal salvation creates? Are we discharging the debts which Christian convictions, consolations, and commands imply?

I. Our spiritual convictions involve a large debt. We are possessors of religious certainties which it is our duty and privilege to make known. Do our teaching, influence, and practice prove that we are deeply and intelligently conscious of our vast obligations? Do we speak of God, Providence, Heaven, in a tone of reverent assurance, or with faltering accents, as though these truths were based on unsound formulas? Thousands are in the quagmire of doubt: are our leverage powers in constant exercise on their behalf? Are we, as expounders of Christianity, as authoritative in tone and rational in methods

as are the teachers of natural science? Alas! many Christians are allowing the positive to wane into the possible. Others are more anxious to rationalise their beliefs than they are to disseminate them. The intellectual demands of science are more imperious than the clamant cries of home and foreign heathens. What epithets should we apply to a medical scientist who knew of an absolute cure for cancer, but who neglected to make the discovery known? The professor of religion who wraps the truths of the Gospel in the napkin of reticence, or contents himself with covering their original beauty with sectarian plasters, is not a true humanitarian, to say nothing of a Christian. "There is life for a look at the Crucified One." The knowledge of this thrilling fact should coerce the propagation of it. The Christian's primary duty consists in "warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom"; enforcing dogmas, defending "isms," garlanding tombs and honouring ashes are quite secondary in importance. God help us to realise our vast obligations as disseminators of spiritual truths! Does

the influence we emanate prove that we habitually inhale a Divine atmosphere? Do we allow social convention to gag the mouth of spiritual conviction? Is our conscientiousness, even when we play whist, distinguished for its singularity? Is it not true that many Christians constantly suppress the transcendent facts of religion in their businesses and homes, their civic work and social functions? "God is love." Does this glorious truth warm and illumine the morality of all church-going commercialists? "God is righteous." Do the ledgers and transactions of Christian financiers bear testimony to this? Is it not a fact that many who bear the name of Christ are more politically aromatic than spiritually odorous? The lives and actions of Christ's followers must be scented and coloured by the Rose of Sharon rather than by a State orchid. Our very presence should be deadly to doubt and stimulating to faith. God grant that men may always take knowledge of us "that we have been with Jesus"! Do the sublime truths of faith coerce us to expound and apply them? Do we allow the ecclesiastical

passion to overrule and circumscribe our missionary zeal? Many Christians, who often burst into torrents of eloquence in praise of their political hero, are never heard extolling the Saviour of the world. Many more fail to realise that the exercise of their spiritual prerogative should eclipse in urgency the defence of their sectarian dogmas and privileges. A real Christian is first and foremost a spiritual benefactor, not a State beneficiary; an evangelist, not an ecclesiastic. When the practice of the Church is more in harmony with its profession, the revolutions of the redemptive wheels of the Gospel will be accelerated, and the joy of heaven intensified. May our preaching, presence, and practice prove us to be in very truth "the light of the world"!

II. The consolations of religion stand for a great debt. A vision of the Divine presence, purpose, and power involves responsibilities unspeakably urgent and immense. We are surrounded by thousands of sinners who utterly despair of salvation. They have glimpsed the enormity of their sins, and their souls are filled with consuming dread. The

creation of a consciousness of pardon in the self-convicted is a miracle which absolutely transcends the power of any individual Christian or church. Yet it is the imperative duty of the forgiven soul to make known the inspiring truths that "The Lord is merciful and gracious," that the most heinous crime is not absolutely unpardonable, that through Christ the foulest sinner can be presented faultless unto the Father. The Apostles did not indulge in extenuations of human guilt, but they were thrilled with the Divine rationality and entrancing perspective of Christian hope. "The Lord is pitiful and of tender mercy" always represented the deepest and loftiest note of their evangel. God help us, by intensity of conviction and by persistent effort, to rekindle the flame of hope in despairing hearts! "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Let us fervently and constantly preach the Gospel of forgiving love, and our labour will not be "in vain in the Lord." We are in the midst of sorrow-stricken souls whose condition should elicit our profoundest sympathies. The hopeless wails of bruised and bereaved



spirits recall the words of Professor Seeley—"The Christian Church, one would think, is here to cure all this." It is the duty of those who bear the name of Christ strenuously to apply as well as fervently to proclaim the alleviations and compensations of true religion. Our possibilities in this direction are immense. "Weep with them that weep." The potentialities of sympathetic soul-travail are minimised or disregarded. How few of us obey the injunction, "Give for alms those things which are within"! We can in a measure communicate that which is inherent to personality. "Such as I have give I thee." The true Christian can enter into the fellowship of his brother's sufferings, and exhale an influence which is stimulating to faith and hope. "Let your light shine." In the presence of God's "burning and shining lights," clouds of despair become fringed with glory, and the dirge is transformed into a doxology. The debt of the Christian pauper transcends that of the heartless millionaire. A poor believer can give more magnificently and chivalrously than our popular benefactors, whose gifts stand for

nothing but material charity. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God." We are surrounded by Christians, who, in the presence of aggressive science tremble like a partridge at the sight of a falcon, or an electrometer in a thunderstorm. Because their heads are reeling, they fancy that fundamental facts are dissolving. Let the prophets of the Lord set themselves to clarify and intensify the religious convictions of conventional church-goers. How the atmosphere of Emerson stirred and winged the genius of Longfellow! The ozone-laden breath of spiritual assurance is more invigorating to the flabby, timid faith of the average Christian than anything else can be. No Christian, by an act of will, can transform weak vacillation into strong persuasion; but the spirit and administrations of possessors of Christian certainties may be more than radio-active in their effects on nominal believers. God help us, whose sorrows have been turned into joys, wisely and effectively to administer the glorious comforts of spiritual knowledge and grace!

III. The commands of Christianity represent



a huge debt. "Pray without ceasing." These words are infinitely more than a wise injunction; they stand for a definite Divine command which we cannot disobey without soul injury and impoverishment. How often we forget that Christianity has its Sinai with its thundering commands of love. Our strained, restless, feverish prayers are a sad comment on our faith. Comparatively few Christians realise the tremendous potency of fervent prayer. Tennyson firmly believed in the efficacy of intercessory pleading with God :

"Pray for my soul : more things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of."

The Apostle James, the supreme intercessor of the early Church, knew by experience that "the energised prayer of a righteous man is of great force." Let all true Christians aim at greater competency as spiritual wrestlers. Deficiency in "the grace of supplication" is the secret of our lack of peace and power. Peace is not the perquisite of brilliant attainments, pedantry, or pietism, but the glorious result of a relationship which the

truly devotional spirit alone realises; and our power as distributors depends on the right exercise of our capacities as receivers. Our prayers should be infinitely wider in range. "Pray for them which despitefully use you." No ungratefulness or enmity in our fellow-creatures can absolve us from this duty of intercession. God forbid that personal or sectarian prejudices should circumscribe our petitions! May we be filled with the spirit of the dying Redeemer,—“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”! “Do the work of an evangelist.” This must not be regarded as a mere Pauline advice to an individual, but as the imperative command of God to all who wear the livery of Christ. Is the air ringing with the war-whoop of aggressive evangelicalism? We notice everywhere the ceaseless activities and perspiring zeal of materialism. Are the soldiers of the Cross on fire with a passion for souls as sleepless and energetic as that which animates the pursuers of wealth? Are the demands of Mammon more imperious and irresistible than the commands of the Gospel? Is the evangelical instinct of the ordinary

church-goer as active and alert as is the commercial? How tragic are the results of spiritual apathy and selfishness! Said Paul, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." The evangelisation of the creed, character, and conduct of our fellow-creatures should be our supreme aim; building churches, guarding State privileges, perfecting ecclesiastical organisations, are of secondary importance. May God deepen and intensify our consciousness of debt, and may this unspeakable love coerce us to the fulfilment of our obligations!



## THE GENTLENESS OF GOD



## XII

### THE GENTLENESS OF GOD

“Thy gentleness hath made me great.”—PSALM xviii. 35.

THE grandest conception of the Supreme ever possible to man is that of a gentle Deity. The words of Philip, “Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us,” are true from a scientific as well as from a sentimental point of view. The idea of God as merely “a power that makes for righteousness” is as intellectually crude as it is spiritually infantile. The doctrine of the Divine tenderness rests on as secure a foundation as that of the Divine holiness. Mental maturity as well as spiritual perfection is impossible without it. It is inspiring to know that the tendency of the most profound and reverent science of our day is to confirm belief in God’s affectionate paternity. It is not easy to some minds to associate gentleness with



omnipotence, compassion with holiness. To many it is easier to conceive of the Supreme as sitting on a marble throne than on a mercy-seat. Plutarch says, "The atheist does not see God at all; the superstitious see Him malevolent instead of benign." Let us bear in mind that it is sheer superstition to regard God as impersonal essence, impalpable abstraction, heartless potency. "God is love," therefore His worship does not derogate from our manhood, but sublimates and sanctifies our whole personality. It would be self-degradation to bend the knee to an implacable power with no eye to pity, with no heart to love. How does God's gentleness make us great?

I. It sensitises the soul. The *mind* is gently disciplined and developed into maturity. God regulates His revelations to the requirements of individual reason. The sun shines mechanically and is unconscious of the influences which he emits. God is omniscient love, and never works automatically. The rays of the Supreme Intelligence are lovingly and wisely reined. Our earth is but the millionth part of the sun, yet it affects the

gravitating power of that gigantic orb. The mind of man is but a spark, yet it modifies the effulgence of the Divine splendour. The beams of God's love warm and revive the latent capacities of the brain. The discordant strings of the reason are gently tuned into harmony with the Infinite. The extension of our mental horizon is graduated by unerring beneficence. Under God's wise and delicate treatment, man's mental mechanism becomes increasingly sensitive, and able to "think God's thoughts after Him."

The *will* of man is wooed and won by the unspeakable tenderness of Jehovah. There is a very wide chasm between the animal appetencies of the sinner and the self-conscious resolves of the saint. "Not my will, but Thine, be done" are words which represent the acme of spiritual volition. But before this height is reached, there are delicate moral fibres to be straightened and strengthened, and selfish inclinations to be reversed. This is to be achieved not by the compulsion of might, but by the touches and attractions of Divine benignity. We cannot be terrorised into intelligent and

whole-hearted submission to the will of heaven; it is under the softening influences of love that our stubborn wills are subdued, and made to flow into the harmony and rhythm of the Divine intent. This love will gradually rectify our declinations from truth and righteousness, and restore us to perfect accord with the will of the Supreme.

The *conscience* is pacified, purged, and perfected by the gentle ministrations of infinite love. Greatness, in the Divine sense, is impossible to man apart from a restful, rectified, refined conscience. The smile of the Supreme soothes, stimulates, sanctifies this delicate organism. Love alone can rehabilitate this "receiver," and make it ever vibrate with communications from the eternal rectitude. Under the ministries of God's grace, this deranged and stultified faculty becomes an unerring discriminator between good and evil, and an infallible reporter of messages from the supreme equity. In the atmosphere of God's gentle love, this Divine power becomes imperturbably graceful and healthily active. A conscience "void of offence toward God and toward men" is

the grand result of the beneficence of the Supreme.

The *heart* is inspired and enlarged by the gentleness of God. According to the world's estimate, intellectual brilliance transcends benevolent piety. Princely mechanists, whose ideas blossom into engines and ordnances, are crowned, while great hearts are practically ignored. Yet the heart absolutely eclipses the brain. Social and international reformations are impracticable apart from the reinforcements of Christianised hearts. Our workhouses, asylums, and philanthropic institutions are the result of practical brotherhood and not of heartless science. Our ideas of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" cannot be realised apart from heart enthusiasm. The glowing heart of God refines and intensifies our affections, and makes selfishness, oppression, and brutality intolerable. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." We become truly and divinely great when our sensitised hearts respond to the appeals of weariness, want, and woe.

II. It soothes and sinews the suffering spirit. The sympathy and solace of the

Supremely Strong make us great in apprehension. Science can make citadels proof against bombs, but love alone can render the soul impregnable to despair. The sorrow-stricken spirit, that discerns the Divine intent in his grief, quivers with immortal hope. A smile from God eclipses in its transforming effect the effulgent splendour of a midday sun; the one changes a clod into a rose, the other soothes a sobbing soul into a saint and a seer. We have read of an Indian princess whose bosom scorched and shrivelled the flowers on it; but when God presses the sorrowing one to His breast, the blooms of faith revive and the solaced soul exhibits a beauty and emits a fragrance Divine. The gentleness of God makes us great in spiritual discernment; and a clear grasp of the fact that all the laws of Heaven are steeped in love inspires us with a courage which no pain or loss can daunt. When the tempest-tossed, bruised spirit realises that the storms and agonies of life are God's merciful discipline, he becomes triumphantly hopeful. A clear insight into the Divine purpose makes the saintly sufferer great in assimilation.

Love alone can find its way into the innermost shrine of personality. In the atmosphere of beneficence our pores are opened, and subtle heavenly influences percolate into the soul. There is a species of greatness which exhales an influence which is deadly to hope and aspiration. Harsh and heartless criticism almost fatally wounded the imaginative genius of Turner. The precocious poet Keats was mortally grieved by the cruel ridicule and savage scorn of the Press. But in the atmosphere of Supreme Love, the flickering spark of spiritual genius is revived into an aspiring flame, and the absorbent system of the soul is developed and perfected. The influences with which God is surcharged are so wisely regulated that the frailest spiritual organism can imbibe them. Even the Divine righteousness is protective and gently stimulating. The oasis would not exist, but for the protecting ministry of the Orient rock ; and the everlasting mountains of God's holiness shield and perfect the frail blooms of faith and hope. A gentle Divinity alone is assimilable. God wounds the soul of His child



to increase its absorbing capacity. The suffering saint inhales influences to which the scientific stoic is impervious. God's merciful ministries make the agonising soul great in anticipation and receptive power. When our Father embraces us with His impassioned affection, we realise that the lightnings of justice are reined by love, and we incorporate the Divine into our being. Love—the great consoling and communicative quality in God—inspires the grief-stricken child with a stamina that triumphs over all adversities. The divinely solaced and sinewed soul can say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." The most transcendent miracle of love is a Christian who can say when his heart is broken and his life-blood as it were ebbing away, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth good in His sight." Again, the gentleness of God makes us great in another sense.

III. It stimulates to self-sacrificing service. There is nothing our age needs more than duplications of men like Lord Shaftesbury, who emulate the brotherly affection that culminated in Calvary. Great hearts are



the guarantee for the realisation of our civic and religious ideals. God forbid that we should minimise the practical result of artistic genius, inventive power, diplomatic skill, yet these results are gloriously transcended by the achievements of the heart. Possibilities are converted into actualities by the coercion of love. Our legislation will be brought into conformity with the righteousness of Heaven only by the compulsion of a divinely inspired affection. On a statue, in London, we read the following inscription: "The reforms of this century have been chiefly due to the presence and influence of Shaftesbury." Were our giant writers and statesmen as great in heart as they are in thought and diplomacy, the thought of the sufferings of our fellow-creatures would become absolutely unendurable. Did the Church "remember those in bonds as bound with them," what transformations would be wrought in her theology methods, spirit, and ambition! Oh that God would quicken the slumbering, affectional potentialities of our nature and constrain us to cry, "I must work the works of Him that sent me"! Said the great

religious philanthropist whose name we have just mentioned, "I cannot bear to go away and leave the world with so much misery in it." The only absolute remedy for legislative iniquities, ecclesiastical tyrannies, national intrigues, is a Christianised heart. When the millions who bear the name of Christ are great in sympathy and sacrifice, the industrial barbarities and repellant animalisms, that exist in our large towns and cities, will gradually disappear. Then, in the presence of poverty, our pitying instincts will never be inert; chapel charities will never be substituted for personal compassion and self-abnegation; recondite speculations will never be allowed to take the place of Christian practicalities. God has endowed us with capacities for emulating the divinest in His own nature. The all-eclipsing attribute of Jehovah is love; this supreme characteristic may mark our spirit and actions to an extent no other Divine quality can. The sympathising beneficence of God is imitable to a greater degree than is His creative omnipotence. Ruskin, the "knight-errant of the poor," was a more successful imitator of God than

Ruskin the world-famed artist. The commonplace Christian who visits the widow and the fatherless, and weeps with those who weep, gains a place among the immortals denied to Napoleon. May "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, Who comforteth us in all our tribulation," make every one of us "able to comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted by God."

"A heart at leisure from itself  
To soothe and sympathise,"

is a diviner product and a loftier attainment than a princely intellect or national renown. "We shall be like Him" only when self-sacrificing devotion to God and to our fellow-creatures becomes the primary note of our character and life.



## THE ROCK AND OTHER ROCKS



### XIII

## THE ROCK AND OTHER ROCKS

“For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.”—DEUT. xxxii. 31.

UNBELIEVERS, in many ways, practically admit the incomparableness of the Christian's Rock. Darwin's views of the origin of things swarm with unintended tributes to the Christian theory. Evolutionists have confessedly longed for the time when light and reason would justify belief in a personal Ultimate. The study of the Divine has inspired agnostics with a reverence that restrains them from applying to God the ordinary mechanical tests of certainty. Tolstoi acknowledges he was converted from atheism by the simple faith of the pious poor. “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I” is the unconscious prayer of many an honest doubter. The writings and lives of many modern sceptics are pathetic confirmations of the Scripture, “Their sorrows



shall be multiplied that exchange the Lord for another God." Professor Huxley—the brilliant champion of the "Creedless Creed"—when a member of the London School Board admitted that the Bible was the best book for the moral inspiration and instruction of the young. A renowned German sceptic made it a rule that his children should regularly attend the public services in a Lutheran Church. Other rocks stand for what is derivative, illusory, and evanescent, while "our Rock" represents what is primary, practical, and permanent.

I. The saint's Rock stands for what is spiritually primal or ultimately real. A prince among agnostics assures us that "no drowning sailor ever clutched a hen-coop more tenaciously" than thinkers of his school would clutch God were His existence demonstrable by reason. In the spirit of these words we discern a tacit admission of the heart's craving for a personal Ultimate. Know-nothing theorists are crying under their breath, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" The nature of many of their utterances is a marvellous testimony to

the transcendence of the spiritual Rock. On the face of the profounder sceptical thought of the age are the hectic flush and other unmistakable signs of consumption. Of course rank atheism is not absolutely dead; and, in dealing with this type of unreasonable rationalism, it is well to remember the words of Victor Hugo, "Some men deny the Infinite; some too deny the sun: they are the blind." The spirit and findings of pure science are resolving positive doubt into vanity and moonshine. And further, they go far to establish the belief that Spiritual Intelligence is the alpha of natural phenomena. Our most illustrious materialists have ceased to regard the Christian doctrine of origins as essentially irrational; and some of these display a deep anxiety for the reconciliation of science and faith. The trend of events is deepening the conviction that a time is coming when the true scientist will share the experience of Dante—"Suddenly upon the day appeared a day new risen." To the microscopists, who reverently study the developments of cell-life, evolution is becoming a revelation; the glory that fringes that great

mystery—primitive protoplasm—is gradually spreading to its centre and heart. The eye of the biologist is becoming increasingly sentient, and more and more responsive to that Divine Light that “never shone on land or sea.” Oh for a confirmed faith in the fact that religion is “a city which hath foundations”! The primary truth of Christianity—a Personal Evolver—is a dam which will effectively stem the swelling tides of unbelief. There are three undeniable facts I wish to impress on the minds of my intelligent young readers, whom sceptical literature may have perturbed or staggered. The first is, that the Christian’s Rock is a structural imperative of mind and heart; the second, that all true scientific advance is Godward; the third, that the evolution of the spiritual eye renders faith impregnable. God is a constitutional necessity of reason, the apostles of atheism themselves being witnesses. That all life proceeds from antecedent life is a partial but prophetic admission of the Scriptural truth, “For with Thee is the fountain of life.” And the age is gradually discovering what an elastic term “evolution”

is; there is nothing in it that necessarily undermines or disintegrates faith in a personal Deity. A day is coming when reverent science will lay its foundation stones on this Rock. The more highly sensitised the lens of the soul becomes, the more invulnerable will our faith in God grow. Let us not forget the saying of Goethe, that the eye that would see the sun must be sunny. Spiritual insight alone will render us absolutely and ever superior to disturbing fears. That equipoise of thought, feigned by the agnostic type of unbelief, will, by-and-by, become demonstrably irrational, while the faith that sends down its roots to the personal Infinite will be amply vindicated both by reason and experience. The "primitive rocks" of old geologists are now known to be newer than many secondary formations; and the "ultimate atom" of materialism will some day be universally regarded as a comparatively recent product, especially when contrasted with its ageless Cause.

II. The believer's rock embodies what is spiritually practical. According to J. S. Mill, it is wise to preserve the potent delusions

of Christianity for the sake of their practical effect on life and character. Infidel and socialistic literature teems with unconscious testimonies to the superiority of Christianity as a creative, conserving, and constraining force. The sublimest conceptions of Deity, the loftiest hopes and ideals of humanity, the purest passions and firmest convictions of the soul are the direct creations of Christianity. "Behold, I make all things new." True religion raises the temperature of the soul, and causes the rarest spiritual exotics to bud and blossom in character; it changes the axes of our being, and makes us responsive to new supernatural attractions. The introduction of Christianity into the sphere of art means the recreation of music, sculpture, painting, poetry, and architecture. There are inherent chords, latent in the structure of our nature, which godless art never strikes; but the Christianised art of Handel and Tennyson moves our profoundest depths. Christianity is gradually intertwining itself with the fibres of our civilisation, and transforming commerce and progress, politics and patriotism, into absolutely "new creatures."

Regenerating forces are flowing from our Rock into every province of motive, thought, and action ; and selfish prudence and “mere hands” are being metamorphosed into spiritual principles and immortal beings. Christianity is admittedly incomparable as a conserving force. A brilliant sceptic says, “I grant that some of the precepts of Christianity . . . carry some kinds of moral goodness to a greater height than had ever been attained before.” Nothing can preserve and perfect the choicest blooms of mind and heart save true religion. The loveliest Christian roses—faith, hope and charity—attain to perfection of form and fragrance under the shadow of the Divine rock. Let them be transplanted into any other soil and the result will be decay and death. But what is true of the most delicate types of goodness is equally true of the elemental moralities. True religion nourishes and perfects not only the subtler and more complex forms of morality, but also the simpler species on which the very existence of society depends. Infidel statesmen have recognised in the atmosphere of religion a mighty



influence on the side of law and progress. A renowned French atheist has spoken of Christianity as "the greatest civilising and state-building force in existence." History abundantly proves that the Christian religion stimulates and reinforces the secular factors of civilisation as nothing else can. Quench this light and you palsy the heart of society, and its very flesh and bone will rot. The simplest elements of social growth require the Divine for their protection and nourishment. The divinest humanitarianism finds in Christ its supreme inspiration. It was contact with Christ that transformed Paul into a missionary enthusiast. That passionate love for man, that has characterised the self-sacrificing saints of God, could never have been kindled at the painted fires of godless philosophy. The constraints of Christianity are infinitely more irresistible in their force and practical in their results than are the compulsions of mere ethics. Apart from "our Rock" the dreams of reformers and philanthropists are absolutely unrealisable. It is when the love of Christ constraineth us that we are effective, undaunted, persistent



workers for purity, righteousness, and brotherhood; apart from this love the glorious sacrifices of the Church would not be rational. Nansen tells us that the warmth of our supreme orb may be felt in Arctic waters; and the true Christian is conscious of the reviving glow of Christianity even in the most frigid atmosphere of doubt and materialism. The language of the true Christian is, "I must work the works of Him that sent me." This "must" stands for an irresistible constraint, of which the unbeliever is altogether unconscious. Christianity is beyond comparison the greatest creative, protective, and compelling force in existence.

III. The Christian's Rock represents what is spiritually permanent. We were told some time ago that the construction of the Panama Canal would place Gibraltar in a secondary strategical position. But God—the impregnable Gibraltar of the soul—will never be supplanted by any fortress erected by philosophy or science. This Rock will outlast all the munitions of civilisation, and remain unimpaired when the predicted explosions and earthquakes of science have

come to pass. The progress of positive knowledge will never undermine the foundation of the Christian faith. "Change and decay in all around I see." We have witnessed so-called "rocks of science" crumble into sand. What were supposed to be unshakable citadels of physical verities are turning out to be aerial structures of the imagination. The living amœba of a German biologist is now known to be lifeless matter. A celebrated scientist, basing his calculations on solar shrinkage and other natural phenomena, assures us that in three millions of years human life on this planet will cease. But no prophecies or possibilities of true science can be regarded as a menace to Christian faith. "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." The Christian has nothing to fear from the inevitable reformulation of religious doctrine. The advance of science has necessitated the restatement of the primary truths of faith. Critical culture has extended the horizon of Christianity and taught many theologians the alphabet of theoretic religion. Will the "Eternal Father, strong to save," be ever resolved into a

mere impersonal infinitude? Will the time ever come when Christians will be compelled to abandon the rock of experimental knowledge for the negations of fashionable doubt? No; this rock will continue to break in pieces its surging aggressors, and will remain the strong sanctuary of the saint when the "New Infinite" of modern evolutionists shall have waxed old like a garment. A time will come when the Bible will not be regarded, even by the Churches, as the "verbal quintessence of all transcendent truth"; but throughout the successive ages of futurity the Divine Rock will continue to be the only and inviolable security of the believer's soul. And the Christian who hides in the "Rock of Ages" is himself transformed into a rock. "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, ye also become living stones." The one guarantee of permanence of peace is the transformation of the soul into the image of this Rock. To the young man who would fearlessly contemplate impending theological revolutions, I would say, "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace." "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the

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righteous runneth into it and is safe." I can understand nominal Christians, whose defences are lath-and-plaster constructions of their own, trembling with premonition of coming disaster while reading the *Clarion* bulletins. But these predictions of the collapse of Christianity cannot agitate the true Christian who is always conscious of eternal adamant under his feet.

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee."

God grant to us the spiritual wisdom that ever builds on this Rock and that no possible contingency can put to confusion !

"Thou, Thou alone  
Art everlasting, and the blessed spirits  
Which Thou includest, as the sea her waves ;  
For adoration Thou endur'st."

"Let the inhabitants of the Rock sing." Those who hide themselves in the clefts of this Rock can front the future without trepidation. Said Luther to Melancthon, "Come, Philip, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm." And they sang it with positive knowledge of its truth :

"A safe stronghold our God is He,  
A trusty shield and weapon."

## CHRISTIAN MANLINESS



## XIV

### CHRISTIAN MANLINESS

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”—1 CoR. xvi. 13.

THE Corinthians are exhorted to be watchful, steadfast, manly, strong. The exhortation is ever necessary. The duties here enforced are urgent and related.

I. “Watch ye.” There are refined and insidious evils against the encroachment of which we must guard ourselves. We must seriously and thoroughly scrutinise self. We do not advocate excessive, cruel vivisection of self. Our hand must not always be in our heart; yet it is our duty to subject thought and motive, temperature and habit, to strictest tests. Let us watch, lest our minds become subtly warped by atmospheric doubt. The strings of the violin are often deranged by changes in the barometer; the



fibres of the mind are also prejudicially affected by climatic causes. God make us innocuous to every influence that alienates the intellect from Christianity! Let us sedulously guard our conscience against the stealthy invasions of convention; let there be no waning of its authority; let its imperial behests be obeyed with loyal promptitude and wholeheartedness. And let us watch our heart. Disguised vagrants of evil are ever knocking at its door. To extend our hospitality to sin is sacrilegious and fatal. God help us to close every pore in the soul against the intrusion of the false and the impure! Society is full of halfway houses to practical idolatry. Some idolise reason. According to these our Christianity needs rationalising. We must resist this tendency to over-emphasise the dignity and authority of reason. Thousands of Christians are making dangerous concessions to undevout intellectualism. Churches are succumbing to the specious influence of intermediate rationalism. They are not avowed worshippers of reason, yet they reject the Pauline doctrine of the Atonement because it transcends

reason. We must guard the soul against gradual and often unconscious declinations from evangelical Christianity. We must also watch lest we accord to art, politics, science, a homage we deny to religion. Let Turner remain in the drawing-room, but let us not relegate Paul to the attic or lumber-room. Let not the House of Commons take precedence over the House of God, or the discoveries of the Cave over the miracles of the Sanctuary. God help us constantly and implicitly to obey the injunction, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God"! Is our service for Christ as effective as it should be? Is our advocacy of temperance, purity, righteousness as fervid and fearless as it used to be? Can it be said of any Christian worker present, "Strangers have devoured his strength and he knoweth it not"? Is our love for the sanctuary gradually cooling? Absence from the Lord's house is, as a rule, a sure sign of decaying faith and abating interest in Divine things. Is the passion for souls as marked a characteristic of the preacher as it once was? Is not the modern pulpit often more scientifically precise than

spiritually powerful? Is not the worship of many churches more æsthetically formal than evangelically fervent? May we not disregard these ominous signs of declension of faith, waning of influence, and cooling of devotion! May it not be said of any one of us, "Grey hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not"! May we not be blind to any symptom of personal decadence!

II. "Stand fast in the faith." Let us intelligently grip the great fundamental fact of faith—"God is love." The current of thought in some academic circles is setting against this basal doctrine. The term "benevolent," when applied to God, is a mere anthropomorphic adjective; the existence of God is conceded as a vague hypothesis; the Fatherhood of God is a subjective illusion inconsistent with objective fact. Now faith does not mean slavery to the verbal accuracy of a record. We believe that God is a loving Father on experimental rather than literary grounds. The possibilities of science are unthinkably vast, but they have limitations; never will critical culture

achieve the impossible task of identifying Christian consciousness with crude credulity. We believe in the mutual consistency of knowledge and faith; a day is coming when they will be reconciled and fused. "God is love." Out of this one theological note the grandest anthems of earth and heaven have been evolved. "God is love." Discord will prevail until all strings are tuned to this glorious truth. "God is love," therefore our souls will be healed, our tears dried, our longings fulfilled, our bliss consummated. Let us dauntlessly face the facts that are said to be irreconcilable with faith. There are lurid tragedies which irritate the spiritual nerve and quicken into aggressive activity the dormant scepticisms of the heart. Recent physical catastrophes are said to impugn and render incredible the beneficence of the Creator. Quiescent doubt has become a bitter and vehement arraigner of the Divine justice. Thousands are clamorously and importunately demanding a justification of God's ways with men. Yet a more terrible occurrence than that of Martinique is prophesied in the Book: "The earth also and

the works that are therein shall be burnt up." The ultimate basis of belief in the love of God is our own spiritual experience. The floods of eternity cannot quench the fire of my faith. Why? God's love for me is a fact of consciousness. He has fanned the spark of trust into an absolutely inextinguishable flame. No physical disaster can disprove personally realised truth; we shall stand fast in the faith if God's love is an ever-deepening experience of the heart. Let us unwaveringly believe in the promised finale of faith. Grand consummations are even now thronging the horizon of the spiritual seer. Not one glowing promise of the Book transcends the performing power of the Supreme. The loftiest ideals of Divine love are not inherently unrealisable; we shall never have to comfort a baffled God with the words, "Thou didst well in that it was in Thine heart." The beneficent intentions of our Father will be practically fulfilled. "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." Let not the opening tragedies in the drama of redemption blind us to the glories of the final scene. Our loftiest



anticipations will be eclipsed by heavenly realisations. "I shall be satisfied when I awake in His likeness."

III. "Quit you like men." In the presence of the recognised evils of our nature may we exhibit a manly spirit ! There are moments of self-revelation, when the hidden man discloses himself and we contemplate in cold blood deeds done in crises of passion. These critical experiences have plunged thousands into despair. But these presentments of our true selves are beneficent in their purpose ; they are intended to humiliate us, but not to extinguish hope. Let us unflinchingly face the worst in us ; but let not the effect of these self-disclosures be a lapsing into pessimism. Let self-aborrence lead to passionate prayers for cleansing and ceaseless strivings after a purer life. The Ethiop can be made whiter than the driven snow. However dark the stain, it is not ineffaceable ; it is possible to rise from the lowest depths of sin to the loftiest heights of spiritual purity. In the presence of the world's evil may we be apostolically courageous ! The diaries of saintly servants of Christ reveal

times of flutter and embarrassment, of failure to mobilise the faculties in critical emergencies, of sudden descents from starry heights to pessimistic depths. But there is a vision of the Divine resource which feeds the fire of faith when the atmosphere is black with impending calamity. There is a spiritual knowledge which is a grand guarantee against palpitating fears and emotional agitations. The power of God is infinite, the possibilities of evil are limited; an intense realisation of this fact will make despair impossible. May we not mistake momentary disaster for permanent defeat, or what is mirage for that which is real! It is not manly to allow ourselves to become the dupes of morbid imagination, to be unnerved by the war-cries of aggressive unbelief, to sacrifice conviction on the altar of conciliation, to quake and whine as though hell had for ever vanquished Heaven. In the presence of God let us be reverently manly. The splendour of the Divine sanctity should subdue but not stupify us into a state of spiritual syncope. Reverence and self-command are not incompatible. Intercourse with God should fan the flame



of reason and not extinguish it. A vision of the Divine should not paralyse or numb the intellect. There may be reverential awe without self-effacement. True humility does not involve a collapsing of mind, a dissolving of being. "Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord." Communion with God is impossible to the dazed, unnerved, swooning soul. Self-mastery, even in the immediate presence of the Supreme, is possible to the manly Christian. Audience with God should not permanently suppress, but everlastingly develop, personality. God help us in our approaches unto His throne to be profoundly humble and at the same time truly manly !

IV. "Be strong." The back-bone of our personality must not be bent. Spiritual strength must not be confounded with ascetic specialism, doctrinal transcendentalism, bizarre artificialism. The strong saint need never retire to the seclusion of the cloister or the dungeonlike confinement of the nunnery ; firmly rooted in truth and righteousness, he can withstand the winds of exposed heights and survive the fiercest

cyclones of the pit. He is a cedar of Lebanon and not a blue dahlia, a green carnation, or any other artificial product of æsthetic religionists. The strong Christian never strains after impracticable idealisms or unreal sublimations of the faith once delivered unto the saints. He is not a fastidious artist, ever seeking to etherealise the practical, or to add a chaster hue to the rainbow of the Divine promise. We have known temperance advocates who regarded all medicinal preparations as nothing but polluted water. We have known specialists in the Church whose views of pure and undefiled religion far transcended the apostolic conception—"To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." But these exaggerated virtues and excessive refinements must not be mistaken for the spiritual sturdiness of character implied in the exhortation of the text. There are three things that mark the strong saints of God—fearlessness, fervency, and forbearance. They are never staggered by bulletins that reach them from the headquarters of godless

intellectualism; they are never cowed into criminal quiescence when it is their duty to be bravely denunciative; they are never terrorised into inaction by the menace of the mighty or the clamour of the crowd. God save us from being cowardly, cringing, abjectly deferential to worldly pomp and power! According to a modern preacher, a nervous man "cured himself of cowardice by sleeping between a couple of skeletons." The most effective way of acquiring fearless fortitude is by habitual communion with Christ. "And when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John . . . they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." And if we are apostolically strong, no "wet blanket" in congregation or committee will damp our ardour; the temperature of our devotion will not fall, even in the presence of religious icebergs. The martyrs—victims of earth, victors of heaven—were "boiling in spirit" while their bodies were consumed at the stake. And let us not forget that the stronger we are, the more compassionate and forbearing we shall be. "A bruised reed shall He not break." "Father, forgive them,

for they know not what they do.” These words teach us that the Strongest is tender and forgiving in spirit. God help us to be watchful, steadfast, manly, strong!

GUARDING THE GREATEST GIFT



## XV

### GUARDING THE GREATEST GIFT

“Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently.”—  
DEUT. iv. 9.

MOSES exhorts his nation to guard the greatest gift of God—its soul. No possible acquisition can indemnify a nation for the loss of its soul. These words of Moses have a special pertinency for our own times. There are patriots who have yet to learn that territorial aggrandisement and the disintegration of the national soul may take place at one and the same time. No material extension can compensate a nation for spiritual contraction and decay; the preservation and development of the soul of a community transcends every other ideal of politician, financier, or educationist. But the exhortation of the text is as applicable to individuals as to nations. The records of celebrities in



art and literature are full of pathetic phenomena. History reveals the fact that the attainment of distinction may be coincident with atrophy of the soul; while mortal glory is waxing in brilliance, the Shekinah splendour of the soul is waning. "It is not the great that are wise." An ephemeral halo of renown will not compensate painter or poet, politician or philosopher, for the quenching of the soul's glory. God help us to guard the soul against the sacrilegious invasion of the world! The supreme duty of life is to take heed to ourselves and to keep our souls diligently.

I. Let us subject our soul to the severest scrutiny. There are inner regions in our personality unexplored by us, unknown to us. We are told that "the new photography may reveal our neighbour's skeleton"; but it will never give us a true picture of the inward self. The modern physician can detect disease in incipient stages that were unrecognisable to the old practitioners. By the aid of fine lenses and polarised light, he can lay his finger on the minute bacilli which stealthily devour our vitals. In many of

us there are secret moral microbes, of the existence of which we are unconscious, eating away the tissues of our souls. "Examine yourselves" is an injunction which is ever wise and timely. There are chemical solutions which are very effective preventives of dry-rot ; and there are Christian antiseptics which retard and correct corruption of the soul. Let us constantly steep our personalities in these spiritual acids, and putrescent tendencies will be counteracted, and mind, conscience, and heart will be restored to purity and health. There are veneered and canting vices which wear the garb and speak the language of true piety. Vulgar grossness and crimson crimes are cleverly disguised and artistically rouged. The offensive has learned to express itself with æsthetic propriety, and to deceive the most fastidious saints. We must not judge what we regard our characteristic excellences "according to the appearance." What we call "holy indignation" is often only temper set ablaze by a spark from the pit. Our vaunted charity may be nothing but selfishness in Sunday clothes. Pride bedecks itself in the

garments of humility, bows the head and bends the knee, and dupes the very elect. The geologist tells us that small lacertilian reptiles are the kindred of the hugest species of animals known to have existed. May not the refined and attenuated sins of the saint be the direct descendants of foul and monstrous forms of evil now extinct? God help us to discern these delicate and ingeniously disguised evils! May the rays of His holiness illumine our deepest depths, and reveal to our gaze the hidden blights and microscopic beginnings of sin! There are inherited views and prejudices which impede our progress in the apprehension and realisation of the Divine. There are rigid ecclesiastics who carry too much luggage to "run the way of God's commandments." They must disencumber themselves of much superfluous baggage before they can say with the Psalmist, "I will run." The narrow dogmatist, burdened with a crushing load of orthodoxies, journeys to heaven at snail pace. Many sectarian bigots go upon the crutches of "ism," when they might soar on the wings of spiritual intuition. Inspired

impulses are held in leash by denominational convention. The wings of religious imagination are clipped, and the soul chained to the putrid carcase of the past. God help us to "lay aside every weight"! Why should we crawl when it is possible for us to "mount up with wings as eagles"? May God reveal to us our unknown self, and help us to detect the faintest indications of abnormality in our spiritual system! Let us not mistake polished putridity for perfect purity. Thank God, the effacement of all evil is not an impossible consummation.

II. Let us technically train our torpid talents. The intellectualist is often anything but a harmoniously developed personality. French, German, and Italian literatures witness to a tendency to the excessive cultivation of the critical. Scientific seers have suppressed their spiritual sensibilities; the supersensuous is supposed to lack scientific sanction. Religious realities do not reflect themselves on the highly sensitised plates of reason. These lights of learning are often unbalanced, lop-sided personages. This in-artistic disproportion may be gradually

rectified. Let the mere scientist set himself to refine his spiritual sensorium. Let him place his soul in the spiritual current, and breathe the atmosphere of holiness, and undreamt of powers of spiritual emotion and discernment will be roused to activity. As the Spanish gallant developed into a Father Ignatius Loyola, so a mere biologist or astronomer may grow into a sturdy saint. Let the mystic carefully train his practical faculties; the universal quest of ascetic ideals would annihilate society and the race. Let the dreamer devote time and energy to achieve performable religious ends; the delights of reverie will not atone for the suppression of the beneficent and self-sacrificing instincts. The mystic should set himself to exercise and perfect his capacities for practical sympathy and service. He should coerce himself to perform the uncongenial tasks of visiting the sick and relieving the poor. We can, to a certain extent, choose our own environment. Invalids have studied "climatology" with splendid results. Let the dreamy transcendentalist breathe the atmosphere of



Christian practicalities. An hour with General Booth might transform him into an active philanthropist. The literalist in religion often represents an ill-balanced, disproportional soul. Pathetic illustrations of the Scripture "the letter killeth" abound. The Pharisees, adepts in etherealising creeds and sublimating symbols, were strikingly lacking in spiritual perception and sensibility. The modern evangelical, like Grote, often suffers from a "pampered conscience"; his religion is excessively rigid in its exclusions and prohibitions. The father of a modern celebrity would allow his son to play the organ on Sunday, but the piano was not to be touched. The sternly orthodox will often befriend the pauper and curse the heretic. He seldom reads a book except through a theological microscope. Even the purest literature is swarming with religious bacilli, so he will be extremely careful what he eats. What was said of Coleridge is equally true of the fastidious creedist: "He wants better bread than can be made with wheat." Ephraim was a "cake not turned." Let us see to it that we are not burnt on

one side and cold dough on the other. We cannot strangle one instinct without injuring our being as a whole. Milton represents a beautiful combination of the poetic and the practical. Wordsworth says of him :

“Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart ;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.  
So didst thou travel on life's common way  
In cheerful Godliness ; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.”

God help us in our strivings after the lofty not to neglect the “lowliest duties” ! But “first things first.” Our primary duty is to guard and develop the greatest and divinest within us.

III. Let us carefully and conscientiously cultivate our crowning capacities. We must strenuously suppress that which soils, sears, or stifles our sublimer self. We must avoid all pastimes and pursuits that are prejudicial to our peace, power, and progress. John Wesley abandoned mathematics because its study tended to develop the undesirable. Other saintly souls have relinquished the secular in order to realise the spiritual. A



diploma in science is no adequate recompense for impaired spiritual perception. No artistic acquirements can be regarded as satisfactory amends for a contracted, coarsened conscience. Yet an expanding soul more than compensates for vanishing fame or dwindling exchequer. The man who concentrates his energies on accumulating soul, proceeds on strictly scientific principles. This is pre-eminently an age of specialisation. The vast majority of us cannot, like Da Vinci, gain unrivalled distinction in several different studies. There is something pathetic in the failure of Goethe to achieve notoriety as a specialist in botany. To-day he is known as the author of "Faust," and not as an authority on the laws of colour. "Set your soul to seek the Lord" is an exhortation which is universally wise and urgent. The pursuit of the Highest necessitates the exercise, and ensures the development, of the highest. And it does not mean the constant suppression of our "sub-faculties." Max Müller played his special rôle so well because he periodically indulged in music and poetry. But the chief aim of our life should be the

evolution of our noblest self. Our holiest cravings are prophecies and proofs of their ultimate satisfaction. Disclosures of Divine ideals are pledges of and constraints to their practical realisation. "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed thee in the mount." Not only must we contemplate the Highest, but also seek to embody it. Our loftiest ambition should be, to be what we are divinely designed to be. The strictest spiritual science would teach us the duty of subordinating every other aim or quest to this master-passion. Are we assiduously guarding, training, enriching our higher spiritual self? Is the literature we read calculated to inspire and sublime the grandest elements of our personality? Do we habitually ignore the sacred prophets and ravenously devour the secular press? Do cards take precedence over conscience, or ping-pong over perfect peace? Are not thousands of nominal Christians more bent on amassing gold than on acquiring soul? They devote time and energy to the inordinate culture of commercial instincts, and systematically stifle their spiritual faculties.

They live "on the fat of the land," but God hath sent leanness to their soul. "Keep thy soul diligently." The soul may grow indefinitely by the constant appropriation of the Divine. Limitless spiritual riches are within hand-reach. Let us lay hold on them and gloriously aggrandise our souls. We are heirs of special promises that may be perfectly performed. Therefore, "having these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord."

"What is our calling's glorious hope  
But inward holiness?"

Let us make the acquisition of this "inward holiness" our constant aim.



POLICY *VERSUS* PRINCIPLE



## XVI

### POLICY *VERSUS* PRINCIPLE

“Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.”—2 CHRON. xxviii. 23.

A HAZ was the victim of false prudence and short-sighted opportunism. How sadly at fault is the instinct of self-preservation in those people who say “Let us do evil that good may come”! The altars of modern divinities are strewn with the sacrifices of thousands who bear the name of Christ. In many spheres of thought and action, nominal worshippers of Jehovah are, from varied motives, immolating the true at the shrine of the false. Slight compliances with unbelief, delicate concessions to godless intellectualism, seriously injure the spinal column of their souls. Is there a more heart-breaking spectacle than a reputable



church-goer who has allowed his back-bone to soften into gristle? "The infirmity of noble minds"—the love of influence—is debasing many professors of religion into practical heathens. The Church, by its irrational deference to culture, its "inglorious truces" with secular foes, its constant sacrifices to wealth, is guilty of incipient idolatry. Christianity is disastrously affected by its unwise surrenders to, and unholy alliances with, the fashionable deities of the day. There are three things suggested by the text—sacrifice, selfishness, and suicide.

I. Sacrifice. "Therefore will I sacrifice to them." Learning, influence, gold, represent popular idols to which many Christians burn incense even within the precincts of the sanctuary. Many preachers join in the modern clamour, "Great is Diana of learning." They ostentatiously display their knowledge of the last results of "Biblical Criticism," while their familiarity with the Revised Version is emphasised with pathetic obtrusiveness. Public expositions of Christ are marked by excessive deference to scientific unbelief. German rationalism is accorded a prominence

denied to evangelical faith. Speculative theories are allowed to eclipse experimental realities, and the sensitised lens the spiritual eye. There is a growing tendency to give the primacy to intellect, and to bow to the science that would illegitimately monopolise certainty. Recent religious publications, professedly aids to Christian faith, swarm with the views and sayings of brilliant agnostics. Now "this pedantry of quotation" points to a specious and intermediate type of doubt. A literary light of the Church recently admitted that spiritual conviction may sometimes be sacrificed to scientific demonstration. His admission is suggestive of incipient idolatry. In this excessive accentuation of the discoveries and importance of godless science we discern signs of a waning spiritual consciousness.

"Influence" or "power" stands for another idol which is often unconsciously worshipped by many who bear the name of Christ. Nationality, class, party, have their irrational devotees within as well as without the Churches. We are told that Rowland Hill's chapel in London was built

in a circle, "so that the devil should not have a corner in it." Some of our sanctuaries seem differently constructed; they supply many corners where altars may be erected to the powerful Dianas of empire, society, and wealth. The Established Church has "surrendered its indefeasible right to govern its own affairs." The sovereign of this realm is invested with supreme ecclesiastical authority. According to Bishop Thornton, half the livings of our State Church are in private patronage. Spiritual dignitaries are autocratically imposed, its synods and convocations are convened, prorogued, and controlled by secular power. Many Methodists are undergoing the process of modernisation; their creed and conduct are subtly affected by the refined idolatries and imperious conventionalism of society. The prophetic sublimities of Isaiah are discarded for the patriotic effusions of the press. The old Scriptural injunction, "Guard thy soul diligently," reads in some revised versions, "Trim thy nails assiduously." Spiritual principles are constantly sacrificed to secular proprieties. Attendance at church is regulated

by aristocratic rules and practices. "Narrow twicers" are growing into "broad oncercs." In a thousand ways Christians are falling a prey to worldly ideals, and practically conceding to the absoluteness of social forms and standards. The altars of Mammon are covered with the oblations of the Churches. Ecclesiastical powers are wielded by the licentious rich. Honoured seats in the sanctuary are strictly reserved for wealthy men of leprous character. The centre of gravity is being shifted from grace to gold. We are compelled to admit the inordinate influence of money in the councils of the Church. The commercial instinct too often holds the reins of evangelical zeal. Christian sympathies and spiritual prerogatives are suppressed and circumscribed by mammonistic rules. The coronal faculties of the soul are often inert, while the financial instincts are strenuously exercised. May God save us from the fatal folly of offering incense to these popular deities! Let us ever guard our souls against the insidious encroachments of unbelief and worldliness.

II. Selfishness was the constraining motive

of Ahaz. "Therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." It is marvellous how subtly selfishness disguises itself. Extravagant eulogisers of critical science are sometimes animated by prospects of reputation for breadth, scholarship, and intellectual up-to-dateness. The dignity and demands of reason are eloquently emphasised and strenuously enforced in order to escape the opprobrious epithets "emotional," "narrow," "puritanic." A Church dignitary has openly confessed he would rather be regarded as a rationalist than as an uncultured evangelical of the Spurgeonic type. There are many expounders of religion who seem to value the plaudits of the learned far more highly than the gratitude of the pious. Let us pray for the Christianisation of our motives and ambitions! The religious purposes and aims of the truest Christians are not always free from microscopic spores of selfishness. Only when cleansed from these minute specks of corruption in our motives and action can we say with absolute truth, "The love of Christ constraineth us." God help the Churches implicitly to obey the apostolic



injunction, "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God"! How many enter into friendly confederation with secularism from motives of self-advantage! What a high price the National Church pays for its privileged status! How many successful Nonconformists are offering sacrifices to the Establishment from motives of pride and snobbishness! The marriage service is invalid when performed in a Methodist chapel, so a priest of the true apostolic succession is asked to "tie the knot." When elected Mayors, they take the Corporation to the State Church. Their children are often sent to High Anglican institutions, where they soon learn to rise above that vulgar thing called "Nonconformity." Flashily-educated scions of prosperous Methodists proudly boast of their absolute freedom from hereditary, puritanical taints. Multitudes of church-goers, who constantly boast of being patriots and imperialists, would strongly resent being dubbed "saints."

The "well-done" of the Master is habitually sacrificed for the smile of a club, or coterie. Many professing Christians act as

though the customs of "class" or "clique" were more inviolably sacred than the laws of righteousness, purity, and brotherhood. The tastes and preferences of the cushioned pews sometimes exert a greater influence on the pulpit than the sufferings and needs of the free seats. God forbid that we should be among those who offer incense on the altars of these secular divinities! When the editor of *Punch* was asked what he considered was the greatest need of the new century, his answer was, "Money. . . . Have every good quality possible, be the most charitable person in the world, and if you have no money—*cui bono?*" We are forced to admit that in Christian circles iniquities are winked at when covered by generous gifts. A dwindling exchequer often causes more anxiety than the absence of conversions. Unpalatable truths are suppressed or deftly flavoured from motives of self-interest. The favour of moneyed magnates is courted by contemptible adulation. God help us to obey the precept of the Apostle, "Examine yourselves"! Let us subject our inspirations to the most searching



scrutiny. The moth and spore of selfishness cannot live in the motives that are constantly exposed to the searching light of God's countenance. May God make our purpose pure as the heavenly Jerusalem, of which it is said, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth"!

III. Suicide was the result of Ahaz's selfish sacrifice. "But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel." The fatal effects of subordinating principle to policy are only too apparent. Fashionable uncertainties are stimulated in Christian circles until the rock gradually shrivels into sand. Of some learned representatives of Christ we may truly say what was mockingly said of the Apostles, "These men are full of new wine." Their vision is blurred, they fail to discriminate between facts and fancies, and because their heads are reeling they conclude that fundamentals are volatilising into dreams. It is suicidal to sacrifice a spark of Gospel light for whole constellations of critical science. The patronage of the intellectual will not compensate a preacher for the sapping of spiritual conviction, and the

waning of personal influence. A rationalised faith does not indemnify the Church for the loss of that clarion note of authority and certainty that once characterised her utterances. We mourn the fact that to many Christians the broadening of their conceptions of inspiration has resulted in a weakened grasp of the primary facts of revelation. This exclusive passion for scientific accuracy and scholarly theories is proving ruinous to the peace and power of thousands of our people.

Again, the reflex results of the Church's sacrifices to secular authority are awful to contemplate. The prices paid for national emoluments and protection include the surrender of spiritual independence, the waiving of specific Christian rights, the subservience of the soul to State statutes. I am told that right under the altar of St. Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street, London, is the booking-office of an electric railway station. How suggestive is this of the undermining of the spiritual by the secular! Worldly forces, with which the Churches are allying themselves, are excavating the ground on

which these spiritual institutions rest. A deacon of a church was asked the other day how his denomination was prospering in the town. His answer was, "Our collections are higher and our conversions fewer than they have ever been." The material prosperity of a church may be coincident with its spiritual paralysis and stagnation. The inevitable result of the inordinate cultivation of the social is religious atrophy. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto many a worldly-wise and outwardly prosperous church, "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." What shall a Church give in exchange for its soul? God help religious communities more intensely to realise that no secular aggrandisement will atone for spiritual contraction and inward decay! Churches have grown hump-backed by their habitual stooping to wealth. According to Milton, Mammon was the "least erected" of all the fallen angels:

"For even in heaven his looks and thoughts  
Were always downward bent, admiring more  
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,  
Than aught divine or holy."

Wordsworth says "wisdom is often nearer when we stoop than when we soar." But true wisdom is leagues away from us when we bend inglorious submission to worldly wealth. Such a "stoop from sovereignty" paralyses and debases the soul. Shakespeare says, "Let us be sacrificers, but not butchers." We cannot sacrifice even the fringes of our personalities to culture, convention, or mammon without being virtually self-homicides. God save us from this false and fatal policy of selfish prudence !

THE REASONABLENESS OF  
RELIGION



## XVII

### THE REASONABLENESS OF RELIGION

“Being always ready to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you.”  
1 PET. iii. 15.

ROMANES, before he died, reached the conviction that the profoundest metaphysics imply a theology. And one of the most eminent scientists of our day—Lord Kelvin—says “If you think strongly enough, you will be forced by science to the belief in God, which is the foundation of all religion.” The statement of Mr. Benjamin Kidd, “A rational religion is a scientific impossibility,” was dictated by superficiality, not profundity, of thought. Thank God for an intensifying conviction that there is a tryst, or a peaceful meeting-place, where reason and faith, science and Christianity, will eventually kiss each other!



The truths that transcend the comprehension of the mind do not necessarily contradict the principles of the mind. The sun eclipses the star, but it does not extinguish it. Spiritual religion represents the sublimest rationalism; it is not only harmonisable with the higher reason, but imperative to it as its completion and crown. What reason can the Christian give for his hope in reference to the providence of God, the progress of the Gospel, the perfection of the soul?

I. The believer's hope in reference to the providence of God is sublimely rational. A glimpse of the power, plans, and purpose of Divine Providence is the secret of true Christian optimism. To the man of spiritual insight, the apparently reckless forces of nature are reined by the Supreme. To the superficial observer, terrible catastrophes and awful holocausts of mortal life impugn the omnipotence as well as the beneficence of God. What reason can the Christian give for an undisturbed faith in the almightiness of God when confronted by disastrous convulsions, such as those of Lisbon and

St. Pierre? His answer is, "I know Him Whom I have believed." To true faith God vouchsafes a vision of His might, which makes the theory of its temporary dethronement eternally impossible. When the all-eclipsing tragedy, prophesied in Scripture, shall come to pass, when "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up," the believer's peace will remain unrippled. Of course, the reason advanced by the spiritual seer must not be identified with logical demonstration; neither must it be regarded as the result of intellectual anæsthesia. What are impregnable truths to the spiritual apprehension, are equally immovable solidities to the mind. The rationalist becomes an optimist when supplied with the microscope and telescope of faith.

Again, the plans of Jehovah are known to the Christian to be superbly rational. The mysterious methods and procedures of God have acted on many souls like an "electric irritant," quickening dormant unbelief into aggressive action. The infinite wisdom of Jehovah is often apparently outwitted by strategic evil, and the doubt-breeding theories

of Schopenhauer and Hartmann are being constantly stimulated by the endless calamities of life. Even Christians sometimes inwardly resent the seemingly "Spartan discipline" of Heaven, and moodily submit rather than intelligently acquiesce. Yet, in spite of devilish antagonisms and blood-curdling cruelties, a reasonable and persistent hope is possible. This triumphant confidence in the supremacy of the Eternal Wisdom is the result of spiritual perception. He who discerns God is assured that the universe is based on a bed-rock of everlasting reason. The resignation which exclaims "Though He slay me, yet will I put my trust in Him," represents the climax of reason as well as of faith. A maelstrom has quickened spiritual instincts which a great calm would fail to stir. A celebrated philanthropist assures us that a visit to an asylum aroused and developed his humanitarian sympathies as nothing else did. The Christian's midnight song has often been the sweetest and most thrilling. So-called "calamities" have hastened the realisation of the grand consummations that fill the Christian's horizon.

Hell has never checkmated or stolen a march on the infinite wisdom of Heaven. The purpose of God is unquestionably benevolent. The hope that "all things work together for good" is not the result of shallowness, or flippant expectancy. "He endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." These words stand for an intelligence more heroic and sublime than that represented by some of the waxen celebrities in "Madame Tussaud's." The faith, that fearlessly confronts the moral anomalies of history and experience, can give a reason for its fortitude and peace. A purged spiritual vision is the one unchangeable condition of mental rest. Glimpses of God are more intellectually effective than the brilliant flashes of atheistic science.

II. The Christian's hope with regard to the progress of the Gospel is gloriously reasonable. The permanency of the truths of Christianity is receiving constant glorious corroborations. Scientific excavation is supposed by some to be successfully demonstrating that Christianity is a rickety edifice based on bog. There are others who think that evolution renders the theory of an eternal Evolver

superfluous, and that critical intellectualism has demolished Christian spiritualism. In the Churches there is a growing suspicion that so-called basal beliefs do not represent the doctrinal finale of faith. Now, the one primal certitude of the Christian religion is "God is love." The present methods of some churches of expounding and defending this all-inclusive fundamental will grow obsolete; but the vast possibilities of future scientific discovery imply no menace to this alpha and omega of Christianity. The startling disclosures of the astronomer, the evolutionary theories of a Darwin, the literary puerilities of a Blatchford, have not even rimmed with blackness, to say nothing of extinguishing, the Sun of Christianity. Belief in the primary certitudes of Christianity is more rational to-day than it has ever been. There are creeds, theories, orthodoxies, that have shivered to atoms, but this grand, ultimate fact of faith, "God is love," stands for the growingly impregnable Gibraltar of rational belief, and the acme of God's interminable self-disclosures. Therefore, we face the glorious possibilities of scientific



discovery and spiritual revelation without misgiving. The past triumphs of the Word sublimely justify Christian optimism. History proves that the crucifixion of Christ—seemingly the most tragic discomfiture of Heaven—was an all-eclipsing victory. Martyrdoms have sinewed and kindled into aggressive zeal the faith of millions. Christianity has inspired philanthropies incomparably glorious in heroism and effectiveness. It has proved itself to be the greatest state-building force in existence. It lies at the heart of all genuine social and industrial reforms. In the most brilliant Pagan civilisations the inalienable rights of the individual was a doctrine universally disregarded. Through the influence of Christ, these rights are to-day possessed and exercised by many millions of the race. The magnificent miracles wrought by the Gospel in past ages abundantly justify the hopefulness of the Church. The transcendent achievements of Christ, in every department of thought and activity, make pessimism altogether irrational. No; true faith does not build its house on the slopes of a Vesuvius. True religion is

a rising sun and not a waning orb. Clever devices for the dethronement of Christ have come to nought. "The Lord reigneth." The present trend of events rationalises the loftiest religious hope. The superficial observer is constantly mistaking temporary eclipse for permanent extinction. To him the tide of spiritual advance seems on the ebb. Iniquity seems more persuasive than sanctity. Thousands of the masses believe that organised Christianity allies itself with tyrannical social and industrial systems; yet there are innumerable proofs that the civilised societies of the twentieth century are progressing morally and spiritually. Christianity is everywhere encroaching on heathenism. The passion for social righteousness, kindled and sustained by Christ, is stronger than it has ever been. The past and present victories of Christ are but types and prophecies of far grander results which are to follow.

III. The entrancing hope with respect to the perfection of the soul is grandly reasonable. The perfection of the believer's character is infinitely more than a rational possibility.



The Christian's ideal is a guarantee of its ultimate realisation. The creation of a soul involves immense obligations on the part of the Creator. "He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself." The worm has a claim on God. Divinely implanted desires in man are themselves prophecies of their perfect realisation. The apostolic injunction, "Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator," was dictated by a developed and heavenly inspired reason. Clarified and sanctified reason demands that the abysmal needs of personality be met. The satisfaction of the soul's craving for immortality is morally imperative to the Creator. Apart from the Christian doctrine of endless existence, life becomes, even from the scientific standpoint, absolutely irrational. Thank God for the utterance of Sir Oliver Lodge—"The region of religion and the region of a completed science are one"! Even science is gradually admitting that the religious interpretation of life is the correct one. But the continuation of life does not represent all the Creator's obligations with regard to

the true believer. Perfection—intellectual, moral, and spiritual—is promised by the Divine Creator and Redeemer to him who believes. The first instalment of heaven with regard to this promise is pardon. Millions of Christians have an inward assurance of God's forgiveness. Progress in spiritual knowledge and in personal experience of the Divine is an equally indisputable fact of Christian experience. "Nearer, my God, to Thee," is the constant cry of spiritual aspirants as they revolve round their orbits, and are consciously drawn nearer and nearer to the Central Sun. Of course, there are spiritual promises which cannot be realised in this world. The glorious heroes of the past, we are told, "all died in faith, not having received the promises." The saint on earth is a spiritual exotic who thrives in spite of opposing elements, but in heaven he will bloom and shed a fragrance in a way far transcending the possibilities of the present. What will the end be? Will the final consummation satisfy the deepest aspirations of the believer's soul? We read that God "shall see of the travail of His soul and

be satisfied.” What satisfies the Creator will satisfy the created. Let us place more implicit confidence in the all-wise Master-builder. He has not promised what He cannot perform. “His hands have laid the foundation of the house. His hands shall also finish it.”



## A FATAL EXCHANGE



## XVIII

### A FATAL EXCHANGE

"Their sorrows shall be multiplied that exchange the Lord for another god."—PSALM xvi. 4.

WE find pitiful corroborations of this truth in the history of individuals and nations. The reflex effects of this fatal exchange are tragic beyond description. How pathetic are the admissions of the idolaters of reason, art, wealth! Voltaire, after a serious review of his theories, said, "I wish I had never been born." One of the greatest criminals of the centuries—a devotee of Ingersoll, the persistent assaulter of the Christian religion—shouted through the bars of his cell in St. Louis, "I am a Bob Ingersoll man." Pessimism, debauchery, criminality, are the natural results of the deification of art, intellect, money, pleasure. The well-known words of Wolsey, "Had I but served my God as diligently as I have served



the king, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs," find an echo in the hearts of thousands of defrauded and disenchanted souls. To-day, idols of art, philosophy, and secularism are being worshipped by many with disastrous effect on their character and life.

I. There are artistic ideals which many exalt to the rank of gods. According to some, the worship of "beauty" is the most rational form of devotion. A literary savant has recently assured us that the greatest living need of this century is the cultivation of the æsthetic sense. The patronage of art is in the hands of our wealthy aristocracy; and if these moneyed potentates would spend their gold in developing in the masses the love of beauty, the miseries of the age would be annihilated. Now, we would not underestimate the artistic potentialities of human nature. Incalculable good would result from a wise, universal culture of what Burke calls "the arts that beautify and polish life." Beauty is the shadow of the Divine. Many have allowed their enthusiasm for the shadow to eclipse their passion for the substance; the artistically beautiful not only

attracts them, but imperiously dominates them; the promulgation of æstheticism as a new gospel is regarded as their supreme duty. Now the man who dethrones Jehovah, and exalts art to a position of exclusive supremacy, is an unconscious suicide. If carved marble, landscape paintings, lovely dados, precious bric-a-brac, are the only true deities, then it is time to lower the blinds of the universe. In the Book we read, "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away"; but not as the result of multiplication of "art-craftsmen in design." Numberless duplications of landscapists, like Prout, Fielding, Calcott, and Turner, can never dry up the fountain of the world's grief. Yet we read the thrilling promise, "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." It would be wrong to decry poetry and painting, music and sculpture, because some of the most brilliant representatives of these arts were corrupt in character and life. In the past, Christians have been slow to recognise the humanising and uplifting tendencies of agencies not necessarily connected with Christianity. For ages forces have existed in our civilisation—

not distinctly related to religion—which have stimulated and strengthened the noblest capacities and hopes of the soul. An intelligent and intensified consciousness that these forces and gifts involve sacred trusteeship is a great need of the Churches. It is essentially Christian to “covet earnestly the best gifts” of civilisation; but God forbid that our artistic and humanitarian progressionists should forget the “more excellent way” of the Apostle Paul! Our crowning passion should be to “follow after charity.” The supremest gift of Heaven is love, and the personal realisation of this love alone can make our loftier aspirations secure against disappointment. A man, rich in imagination, wealthy in ideas, but who is not a conscious possessor of Eternal Love is a spiritual pauper. What fearful reflex consequences flow on the soul of the man who exchanges the Everlasting for the temporal, the Spiritual for the technical, the Highest for the high! From this fatal folly may God preserve every one of us!

II. There are philosophic idols whose altars are covered with the oblations of science

and culture. There are atheists who positively declare religion to be superstition. We do not brand the abettors of this theory, as Addison did, as conscious liars. The following words of Flourens may be regarded as expressing the honest conviction of his materialised soul: "Our enemy is God," "Hatred of God is the beginning of wisdom," "If mankind would make true progress, it must be on the basis of atheism." Yet we believe with Bacon that "a little philosophy inclineth men's minds to atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds to religion." Plato was abundantly justified in describing atheism as a disease of the soul before it becomes a disease of the mind. The tragic effects of absolute atheism are beyond the power of language to depict. Nothing accelerates the progress of disease and death like positive denial of God. Those who exchange Christian theism for philosophic atheism make every star in heaven a liar, and increase their sorrows a millionfold.

Again, according to many, the Great Unknown has superseded the Universal Father. Christianity is to them made up

of mysticism, fanaticism; it is largely a doctrine of echoes, the Church being merely a sounding-board, and so-called "revelations" only the reverberations of the voices of by-gone ages. We admit that the existence of God has been advocated in a manner which, from a forensic and scientific point of view, may be riddled with the pellets of criticism. Our religion should be divested of all its irrational features; but when the last vestige of superstition is stripped away from Christianity, there remains a Divine residuum which it is essentially irrational to ignore. The Jehovah of revelation is demanded by reason. The avowal of a blank ignorance of God is a decisive and pathetic proof of a disordered mental mechanism. They intensify their grief who allow the "perhaps" or the indefinite "something" of the scientific agnostic to usurp the throne of the Absolute Deity revealed by Christ. There are Christian philosophers who have practically exchanged Jehovah for another god. In the Churches we find sentimentalists whose object of worship is an infinite emotionalism; sectarians who have



converted the boundless ocean of Infinite Love into a narrow ecclesiastical channel; pantheists who believe in a doctrine of Divine immanence which makes free will and moral responsibility impossible. But the practical result of all these substitutions for the "God of love" is an indescribable intensification of sorrow. Thank God for the words of Robert Louis Stevenson—once a sceptic—"But indeed with the passing of years . . . there grows upon me the belief in the kindness of the scheme of things, and the goodness of our veiled God, which is an excellent and pacifying compensation"! There is truth in the words of Young, "By night, the atheist half believes in God." If the woes of the world have made sceptics of some, they have also developed the visual and auditory capacities of millions. Said a celebrated Christian philanthropist after a visit to a city slum, "Thank God for a glimpse of hell!" Apart from Jehovah, the sorrows of the universe would quench the last spark of hope, but "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

III. There are secular deities that are

being practically substituted for Jehovah. Christianity is accused of obstructing real social progress ; humanitarian ideals are realisable only by material means. The inculcators of this theory “spell God with a small ‘g,’ ” and exchange Providence for utilitarianism. Liberty, equality, and fraternity are to be secured by an altruistic enthusiasm generated by reason and knowledge. Now Mr. Benjamin Kidd assures us that the brotherhood of the age is the direct product of Christ. Oh that our secularists who would “build a city that hath foundations ” would learn this lesson ! They multiply their sorrows who reject the Christ that stimulates, sustains, and sanctifies our social aspirations. True religion puts a “wholly new system of nerves into every virtue.” The true passion for the establishment of better material and moral conditions is kindled at the altar of religion and not at the shrine of secularism. The stimulations of stoical, abstract truth, reason, intelligence, are not to be compared with the coercions of the great Personal Beneficence. The social sympathy and service of irreligious secularists



are pitiful contrasts, so far as intensity and effectiveness are concerned, to those of Howard, Wilberforce, and Shaftesbury. What feeds the true philanthropic flame? Does the true Christian say with Olive Schreiner, "There is no justice; all things are driven about by blind chance"? Does a smile from passionless knowledge, economy, utility, nerve and sinew the anti-Christian altruist, and inspire him with triumphant confidence? The mere materialist invariably finds that his sphinx sits for ever dumb and heartless. That morality needs no inspiration is a doctrine which the secular blasphemy "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," tragically refutes. Oh that our godless progressionists would learn that "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain"! That God is the creator and preserver of society is the one glorious truth that rationalises humanitarian zeal, hopes, and ambitions. In "National Religion" we read, "Secularity is the English vice." The tendency to substitute the social for the spiritual is stronger and more universal than

it has been for ages. What will the end be? The exclusion of the Divine from our motives and aspirations would make life a maddening enigma, and increase our sorrows a thousand-fold. Our hope is in the sanctification of the secular, and not in its deification. Christ must enter into the construction of our social, commercial, and political machineries, as well as supply them with motive power. To the distracted and defrauded materialist, whose self-elected gods are impotent to sinew and nerve, we say, "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." And let the blind believer who says, "He keeps absent—why I cannot think," pray for a purged vision. God is never an absentee.

"In every sorrow of the heart  
Eternal mercy bears a part."

Personal glimpses of His presence, power, wisdom, and benevolence make hope rational and triumphant, and despair the blackest of crimes.

PENITENCE, PARDON, PURIFI-  
CATION



## XIX

### PENITENCE, PARDON, PURIFICATION

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”—1 JOHN i. 9.

“**M**ISERABLE comforters are ye all,” we say to those who ignore the true source of the world’s misery. Sin is not an irritation which the ointment of humanitarians and economists can cure, but a cancer which the Divine Surgeon alone can remove. The predicted results of scientific evolution will fall far short of salvation. No electric flash can pierce the gloom of guilt. No “X-Rays” of science will kill the germs of spiritual disease. No lever of earth will lift the weight that crushes the soul. The doctrines of my text—penitence, pardon, purification—are not belated themes, or anachronisms with no

moral pertinency for us; they represent the most urgent need of the twentieth century. Therefore I do not apologise for making the forgiveness of sin the subject of my discourse. The most urgent need of many of my readers is a consciousness of Divine pardon. The assurance that our sins may be forgiven thrills my soul. "Be ye reconciled to God." An inward certainty of this reconciliation is possible to every one of us. Apart from this certainty, spiritual power, progress, and peace will never characterise our lives.

I. Penitence makes pardon possible. The word "confess" means much more than mere admittance of sin; it includes true contrition of spirit, a humbling consciousness of guilt. Self-righteousness closes every pore in the soul, and makes it impervious to the healing beams of forgiving Love. The self-complacent spirit is innocuous to the pardoning grace of God. To forgive the impenitent would have no practical effect; genuine repentance alone can make us conscious recipients of mercy. Let us scrutinise our hearts. There is an introspection which is not only healthy, but indispensable to peace

and purification. The truly repentant prodigal came to his father in his filthy rags, and not bedecked in the gilded garments of pretence. He did not come furtively, or in a self-condoning spirit, but openly, and with a sense of utter unworthiness. Thousands of nominal Christians have not the assurance of pardon because they have adopted the methods of the stowaway; they did not enter the Church through the front door, but climbed in through a back window. Others have united themselves to the Church in a self-palliating spirit, and booked their passage not in their proper name of "sinners," but disguised under such aliases as "ill-starred" or "unfortunate." The repentance of many is marked by wounded vanity rather than self-abhorrence; their moral lapses are regarded rather as a stain on their pride than a grief to their God. There is a penitence which is nothing more than a nervous agitation, a consuming dread of the personal consequences of sin. There are others who attribute their estrangement from God to psychological changes. Inevitable mental transitions have widened the chasm between



their spirits and the Supreme. Their God has evolved into a sublime automaton, with which sympathetic intimacy is impossible. Literary princes apply the mildest epithets to sin. John Morley says, "The difference between virtue and vice . . . is only phenomenal, yet there is a difference enough." Carlyle seems to merge morality in intellectualism, and to exalt genius at the expense of goodness. Mr. Justice Stephen assures us that morality would survive the extinction of Christianity. He writes, "I think we could live very well without religion." Modern poets and artists are up in arms against purity and piety. Brethren, in spite of the glozing words of sceptical culture, sin is foul leprosy and the one sorrow of God. Our lack of peace—so painfully evident in many of us—is the inevitable result of impenitence. The unrepented sins, that lie covert in the heart like a black dam, resist the flow of forgiving love. We are paralysed by fears, because we have never glimpsed the heinousness of our sins and at the same time stormed the Eternal Throne with passionate cries for mercy.

“Thou great tremendous God,  
The conscious awe impart.”

The first rung of the ladder that reaches up to heaven is repentance. Ascent is ever impossible to those who refuse to plant their feet upon this initial step. When the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, we read that this unfaithful disciple “went out and wept bitterly.” Let the cry of every penitent soul be, “Cast a look and break my heart.”

II. Pardon follows penitence as a natural and inevitable sequence. “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins.” We must not identify forgiveness with a Divine sentimentalism which hoodwinks or deposes righteousness. Pardon does not involve the cancelling of law, or the drugging of justice. When love forgives, no attribute of Jehovah is in a state of anæsthesia. There is no narcotic principle in existence that can soothe into insensibility the outraged instincts of eternal justice. Neither is pardon the result of mutual concessions between holiness and love. Salvation is not based on a huge compromise agreed upon by the attributes of God.

“O inglorious league !  
Shall we upon the footing of our land  
Send fairplay orders, and make compromise,  
Insinuation, parley, and base truce  
To arms evasive ?”

Yet, we read, “ Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” But this grand reconciliation is not a “ base truce ” which threatens the collapse of the Divine Throne. The sublime harmony that exists between the attributes of the Supreme is eternally inviolable. Forgiveness represents not the eclipse, but the glorification of righteousness. When the merciful Father embraces the sorrow-stricken prodigal, He does not deviate a hair’s-breadth from original rectitude. Indeed, the pardon of the sincere penitent is demanded by justice. The whole weight of God’s righteous being impels Him to absolve the pleading penitent. The Divine absolution is vindicated by the unreserved, shame-stricken confession of the returned prodigal. Then let us banish all doubt of the congruity of pardon with purity, of salvation with the sanctity of the Supreme. We have read of “ the demoralising effect ” of the doctrine

of Divine compassion. Calvary has been spoken of as the outcome of a Divine emotionalism, which, like a resistless flood, swept away the opposing barriers of rectitude. We read in the Psalms, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains." Have the eternal mountains of justice melted before the Lord? Is it of these we read in Ezekiel, "The mountains shall be thrown down"? and in Isaiah, "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed"? and in Job, "He overturneth the mountains by the roots"? The awful tragedy in the Island of Martinique would pale away into nothingness in comparison with such a catastrophe. Violent volcanic eruptions do not impair the physical integrity of creation; but destructive disturbances in the "everlasting mountains" of Divine righteousness would transform the spiritual cosmos into hopeless chaos. No; forgiveness is not the result of arbitrary, forensic interference on the part of love, but an act in which all the attributes of the Supreme confederate as intelligent, righteous, and sympathetic allies. The grand result of forgiving grace justifies every

Divine participant. "God is faithful and righteous to forgive."

III. Purification is the grand consequence of pardon. "And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The handwriting of sin on the soul cannot be erased by any instrument of human invention. The foul inscription does not fade with the lapse of years. The original writing may be covered over by gilded letters of cultured pretence. Vice may be subtly disguised in the habiliments of social decorum and refinement, but, in spite of surface polish and proficiency in the art of affectation, evil, in its essence, is ever the same. Yet this spring of evil in the heart may be dried up, and what was once the sepulchre of living death transformed into a sanctuary of Divine life. The essence of the Gospel is not the remittance of condemnation, but the sanctification of the soul. Salvation consists in the regeneration of the reason, the cleansing of conscience, the hallowing of the heart. The mind is rendered innocuous to the sophistries of unbelief. The reins of the imagination are held by purity and truth, and the unclean and the false have



lost their gravitating force. The conscience of the pardoned may become more highly sensitised than the plate of the modern photographer, and reflect the image of sins too ethereal to be recognised by the unsanctified spirit. The "hidden man of the heart" may be restored to perfect purity, to a precision of likeness to God that means spiritual oneness. Is this absolute freedom from the slightest taint of evil an imaginary climax that can never be realised? The Divine faithfulness and justice are pledged to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The discovery of ineffaceable spots on the soul would be a fatal reflection on the spiritual perception and sanctifying power of the Divine Redeemer. We are told that a New York lapidary submitted a diamond to the grinding machine for the space of three months. At the end of that time the stone was found to be absolutely unaffected by the ordeal, and the lapidary gave up the task in despair. But the revolutions of the wheels of redemption will never fail to polish and perfect the believer's soul. God can heal not only the putrifying sores of flagrant vice,

but also the unrealised wounds of the deadly bacilli of evil that secrete themselves in the deepest inwardness of our being. The electric beams of His righteousness reveal the hidden blights that taint the motive and pollute the springs of thought. Sin knows no "law of protective colouring" by means of which it can escape the detection of God. God discerns iniquity in its microscopic inception, and cleanses the soul from the faintest stains.

"He wills that I should holy be."

And if my will is merged in His, the grand consummation—the perfect sanctification of my soul—will be realised. God neither promises nor attempts the impossible. The penitent may be pardoned, the pardoned may be perfected. Friend, are you forgiven? Pray for true repentance. Brother, are you pardoned? Never dishonour God by doubting His power to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.



## THE FRUITAGE OF FAITH



## XX

### THE FRUITAGE OF FAITH

“In your faith supply virtue ; and in your virtue knowledge ; and in your knowledge temperance ; and in your temperance patience ; and in your patience godliness ; and in your godliness love of the brethren ; and in your love of the brethren love.”—2 PET. i. 5-7.

I. “**I**N your faith supply virtue.” The word “in” suggests that virtue must be a natural development of faith, and not an external quality aggrandised by it. Notice also that the term “virtue” denotes something distinct from its popular connotation. It stands for manly courage, resolute will, fearless fortitude. Has our faith evolved this virtue? Are we strenuously suppressing the baser elements of our nature? Do we, in the teeth of consequences, courageously subordinate the lower to the higher? Is a sanctified will—a power compared with which gravitation is a toy—always at the helm of

our being? Does conscience persistently refuse to enter into ignominious compromises with base and intriguing instincts? Does love always successfully resist the sacrilegious invasions of selfishness and hate? Have we allowed the microbes of worldliness and carnality to eat their way into the sacred cell which contains the very essence of our personality? Do we ever permit the brutish within us to imperiously coerce the Divine? or the high in our souls to usurp authority over the Highest? And further, do we face unflinchingly the opposing elements in our surroundings? Do we collapse under the strain of antagonism, and succumb to the disintegrating influences of timidity? Are ravishing spiritual ideals fading into dreams in the atmosphere of doubt and materialism? We are all inevitably affected by environment, but whether for good or evil depends upon ourselves. Let us in our faith supply that Christian heroism which sternly refuses to capitulate to evil, that spiritual resoluteness which triumphs over contrary forces. When our religion is characterised by the sturdiness of a Luther we shall not be unnerved by

the power and wiles of our foes. Then, as Shakespeare puts it :

“ Our castle’s strength  
Will laugh a siege to scorn.”

II. “ And in your virtue knowledge.” The term “knowledge” here is not exactly synonymous with learning, erudition, intellectualism. A cultured theologian, with a creed corrected and enriched by science and philosophy, may be pitiaibly devoid of that kind of knowledge which Peter had in mind. The word “knowledge” here signifies that Christian sagacity which intuitively apprehends the demands of the hour. A clear discernment of the necessities of the moment represents one of our supremest needs. We mourn the fatal blunders of the Churches in national and ecclesiastical crises. The disastrous sequences that followed our past failures instinctively to grasp the requirements of emergencies are heart-breaking to contemplate. Do Christians clearly discern the portentous significance of the spirit, methods, and assertions of scientific unbelief? or of the tragic doctrinal antithesis of Anglicanism and Dissent? Is belief or

disbelief in the supremacy of national law over religious conviction the result of that practical Christian knowledge mentioned in these words? Is the attitude of the Churches towards secular and international affairs always determined by a wise interpretation of the urgent needs of the times? "Knowledge" in the text also stands for that spiritual wisdom which regulates zeal and determines method. There have been Christians who were nothing but uncontrollable Niagaras of emotion. They have persecuted when they should have prayed, they have burnt at the stake true heroes they should have pressed to their heart. Our ecclesiastical dictators have sometimes advocated methods that were glaringly unwise. Were the words of Newman, "A publisher of heresy should be treated as if he were embodied evil," inspired by Christian knowledge? Never in the history of the Church has this special kind of prudence been more necessary than it is to-day. We have entered an intensely critical stage. May all who bear Christ's name be ever governed by this supreme wisdom!

III. "And in your knowledge temperance." The word "temperance" here means infinitely more than abstention from the use of intoxicants; it stands for the wise regulation of all our passions and powers. Do our character and conduct bear witness to a judicious government of self? The brandy-flask and the beer-bottle are not responsible for all the intemperance of the times. There are æsthetic, political, and religious atmospheres the inhalation of which results in mad intoxication. There are those whom we may term artistic inebriates, men who make "beauty" their exclusive passion. A lovely scene on canvas enraptures them, but living pictures of misery in a city slum fail to awaken a ripple of sympathy on the surface of their slumbering beneficence. There are others whom political orators can excite almost into frenzy, but whose hearts fail to respond to the most thrilling and persuasive pulpit eloquence. And are there not many religionists who immure their souls within their study-walls and degenerate into theoretic troglodytes? These habitually ignore Christian practicalities, and allow



their energy to evaporate in dreamy sentimentalism. Are we ourselves practical examples of that Christian "temperance" which means self-command? Are we wisely stimulating the lethargic elements of our nature? Are we avoiding the exaggerations of mere prudery, and ever recognising the sacredness of the natural and the supremacy of the spiritual? Does intellect, passion, or Christian love sit upon the throne of our personality? How all-eclipsing in importance is the injunction, "Guard thy soul diligently"! God help us deeply to realise the truth of the words, "A charge to keep I have"!

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,  
These three alone lead life to sovereign power."

IV. "And in your temperance patience." The word "patience" here includes a submissive endurance of personal hardships, an unwearied persistence in the path of duty, a calm assurance of the grand fruition of faith and toil. Christian patience enables us to accept uncomplainingly the unavoidable experiences of life. The spirit in which the

saints of God assent to the dark dispensations of life is a far more effective testimony to the reality of faith than the outbursts of emotionalists, or the arguments of philosophers. Intelligent and devout acquiescence in the will of God, even when the heart is riven and the life-blood ebbing away, is gloriously possible. An intuitive discernment of the truth of the words :

“In every sorrow of the heart,  
Eternal mercy bears a part,”

will save us from collapse under the heaviest strain. And true Christian patience will save us from feverish anxiety with regard to the practical results of religious toil. We often allow our zeal to become gradually extinguished because the net effects of our labours are apparently trivial. We are impatient to see the full fruition of our work, and often say in effect, “How slowly the Sun rises ! How slow and circuitous are the methods of God” ! May the Lord help us never to forget that “apples bitter in July may be sweet in August” ! The good seed we sow will in God’s good time

bear fruit to His glory. We are often impatient to realise our spiritual ideals; we seem to be separated by a virtual infinitude from the transcendent perfection that fills our imagination. There are insects and birds that mature in a few days or weeks; but the cedars of Lebanon are not the mushroom growth of a single night season. Absolute perfection of character is not the result of an instantaneous miracle; there are inevitable intermediate stages of growth between us and this grand consummation. It is when we personally discern the necessariness of these tardy moral processes that we can "wait patiently for the Lord."

V. "And in your patience godliness." This word "godliness" stands for a personal, profound, practical reverence for the Divine. Are we among the number of those who "have the form of godliness and deny the power"? Ritualistic mummeries are not always the result of direct personal perception of the purity and goodness of God. The more intimate our individual communion with the Supreme, the less necessary do ceremonial elaborations in worship become,

and the freer we shall be from pietistic flummeries and angularities. "Exercise thyself unto godliness," not by mere outward gesticulation and ecclesiastical gymnastics, but by spiritual wrestling with God and consecrated devotion to His service. And the deeper our reverence is, the more discriminating will it be. We are surrounded by subtle intermixtures of good and evil. The devilish apes the Divine. And there is a narrow and superficial type of reverence which habitually taboos the secular and puts an embargo on legitimate pleasure. A local preacher, whose grammar was defective, was once presented with a grammar book. He refused to accept it on the plea that God was never mentioned in it. The profounder our reverence, the more clearly shall we discern the sacredness of the secular, and the more correctly shall we discriminate between the true and false.

Again, godliness stands for active reverence; it must not be identified with godless stoicism, or passive, unintelligent acquiescence. There is such a thing as a morose and heartless assent to the will of

God, which is as truly irreverent as open blasphemy. True reverence is marked not only by the absence of murmur and complaint, but also by a practical, discerning submission to the will of God. May the Lord help us constantly to emulate His own benevolent sanctity! May our religion be characterised not by obeisant formality, but by practical manifestations of the Divine purity and love!

VI. "And in your godliness love of the brethren." One of our greatest needs as Christians is an intenser realisation of our blood relationship. There is a religious love that is to be distinguished from all shades of sectarian sympathy and ecclesiastical partisanship; a love which no nepenthe of denominationalism can drug into insensibility. True Christians are kindred spirits, which, in spite of doctrinal divergencies, coalesce in the depths of their being. What transformations would take place in the spirit and actions of the Churches were this essential oneness of all true believers thoroughly and universally grasped! How unutterably saddening is the slowness of our growth in



Christian catholicity ! How ineffective and transient is the charity that is inspired by mere churchliness ! There are thousands of Anglicans whose hearts contract and whose sympathies evaporate in the atmosphere of Dissent. A clergyman once refused to pray with a dying saint because a bust of John Wesley adorned the death-chamber. How many Nonconformists practically regard their little Bethel as the metropolis of Christ's kingdom !

“A man may cry ‘Church, Church’ at every word,  
With no more piety than other people ;  
A daw’s not counted a religious bird  
Because it keeps caw-cawing from the steeple.”

Christ, and not a particular church, should be the true centre of religious gravity. A profounder grasp of this truth would extinguish and silence our dreadful hatreds and deplorable disputations, and our Christianity would stand for infinitely more than charity in cassocks or “sympathy in slippers.” The uncharitable zeal that lit the martyr-fires and burnt the elect of God, is still blazing in the hearts of thousands of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Nonconformists.

Hearts are contracted, and sympathies alienated, by the Churches' practical repudiation of the supreme law of love. Ruskin says, "They at least are little to be envied in whose hearts the great charities are dead." God grant that love of our brethren may ever characterise us!

VII. "And in your love of the brethren love." Love represents the greatest of the Divine graces; it must therefore stand for the high-water mark of Christian ambition. Are we cultivating this consummate orchid of character? Is this "love" the ultimate spring of all our motives? Let us ask ourselves, in the first place, whether our lives are practical proofs of the imperiousness of this love. Are we constrained vividly and intensely to share the sorrows of our kind? Many of us allow our sympathies to be circumscribed by the hate or prejudices of our enemies; but no unbrotherliness or disaffection can absolve the Christian from this supreme duty. We must not forget that "the highest exercise of charity is charity towards the uncharitable." Christians must not allow the fountain of beneficence to be



dried by public ingratitude and the unspeakable meanness of the human heart. Let us pray for a humanitarian zeal that will retain its intenseness even in atmospheres of sordidness and brutality. Only those who are "rooted and grounded in love" can obey the injunction "Love your enemies." Our charity must be infinitely more than a periodical welling of emotion. The mountain torrent is practical as well as picturesque, as the revolutions of the miller's wheels testify. Let our charity manifest itself in heroic self-sacrifice on behalf of suffering humanity; in assiduous efforts to relieve and soothe the burdened and sorrowful; in passionate prayers for the poor and perishing.

Again, let us ask ourselves whether we fully realise the sovereignty and the all-completing nature of love. This "love" stands for the crown and completion of Christian character. But not only does it represent the apex of human growth, it is also the absolute condition of the perfection of other graces and virtues. Love is a grace that develops, beautifies, and perfects every other instinct or capacity of the soul. It is by love alone

that the grand consummation—spiritual perfection—can be realised. “Be ye therefore imitators of God.” We shall be like God when love dominates and pervades our being. “God is love.” And, it may be truly said, “a perfect Christian is love.” God grant that our faith may evolve the graces of our text!













